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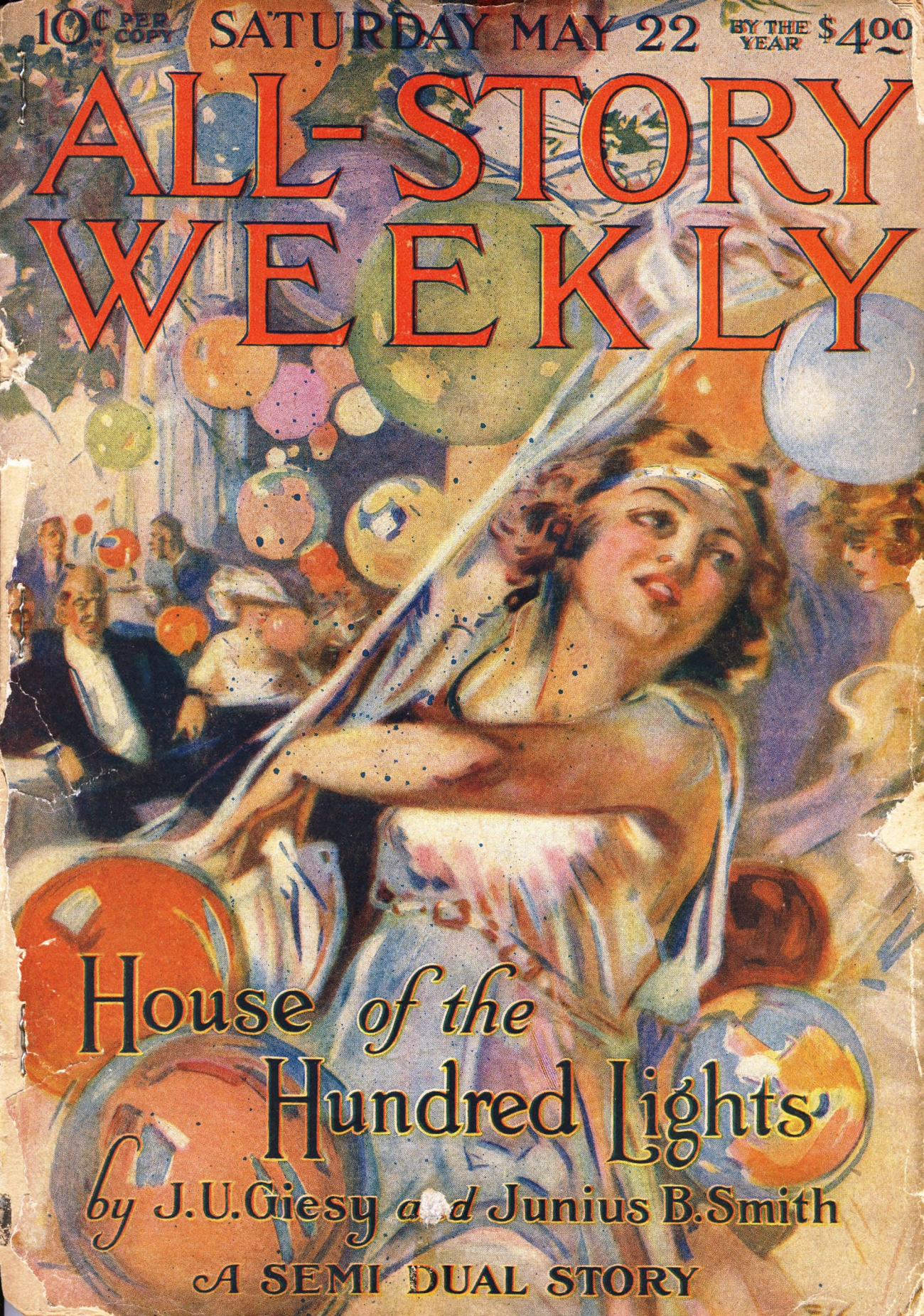
ALL-STORY WEEKLY



House of the Hundred Lights

by J. U. Giesy and Junius B. Smith

A SEMI DUAL STORY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME CX — NUMBER 3

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ONE NOVELETTE

FIVE SHORT STORIES

VERSE

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

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Entered as second class matter May 17, 1915, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. CX — NUMBER 3

SATURDAY, MAY 22, 1920

House of the Hundred Lights

by J. U. Giesy and Junius B. Smith

Authors of "The Ivory Pipe," "Stars of Evil," "The Black Butterfly," etc.

LISTEN to this good news! Here is the first instalment of a new tale in that astoundingly popular series, the Semi Dual stories. *Prince Abdul of Teheran*, affectionately known as *Semi Dual*, needs no press-agent. This is the nineteenth story in which the "Occult Detector" justifies his friendship with "the stars."

(A SEMI DUAL STORY)

CHAPTER I.

THE BUBBLE DANCE.

DID you ever stop to think that fate, as we mortals call it, is a most peculiar thing? Generally, it comes upon us blindly, striking, as we believe, without any warning whatever. And only when the whole thing is over, and we look back on the particular episode in question, can we, if we survive the stroke of fate's bludgeon, perceive how various minor incidents and happenings one by one followed another and led up in a sort of incidental crescendo to the major events of that past time.

Yet there was nothing apparent on the surface of things to point to any climax in the life of Andrew Cahill, district attorney, when he gave a theater party and an after-theater supper to a number of intimate friends, the night of the day he was fifty-nine.

True, there was a strike of the waiters' union, with a demand for a closed-shop policy on the part of the Restaurant Men's Association in progress at the time. But the hotels and restaurants were operating with a makeshift force, and there was seemingly no reason why Judge Cahill, rather than any other, should have hesitated over a decision to patronize a fashionable grill, provided he felt so inclined.

He was a man well known and very well thought of in town. He held the reputation of being eminently fitted for his position, an implacable prosecutor of the wrong-doer, yet at the same time a man past all question impartially fair. And even though he had been one of the strongest supporters of the antisabotage law recently passed by the Legislature, there was noth-

ing to suggest that he had been chosen by fate as the victim of a subtly conceived crime.

He gave his little supper in the Kenton Grill, a decidedly up-to-the-minute part of the night life of the town, operated in connection with the famous and long-established Kenton Hotel.

And he elected to reserve a table bordering on the polished dance floor in the center of the main room. His reason for so doing, as his daughter Ruth afterward explained, was the chief feature of the evening entertainment, known as " the bubble dance."

Of course you've heard the song, " I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles." The bubble dance was based on that. In a big café the entertainment problem is no small matter, and the entertainment manager is always striving for some effect to catch the public fancy, something colorful and full of action, and during the week in which Cahill gave his supper the show at the Kenton Grill had made a hit.

It was just a chorus of girls, with a *première danseuse* and a lot of toy balloons, but it struck the popular taste. The cabaret crowd generally falls for girls and music and colored lights. And the balloons in the song took the place of the bubbles, of course.

The dancers were garbed in white—sheer, filmy stuff. And under the lights with the balloons floating about them, in the otherwise darkened café, it didn't take much imagination to picture them in the whirlwind of the dance as a group of bubble-blowers floating in a mass of variegated froth. Then as the lights came on again, they passed the balloons about among the diners, daring them to blow them. For the balloons were so made that they could be deflated and blown up again by means of a mouth-piece. And after that the whole café blossomed with the many-colored toys, and echoed to laughter, the exclamations of women, and the sounds of explosive poppings, as bubble after bubble was blown up and burst.

The thing was always staged in the Kenton about eleven thirty, for the benefit of the after-theater crowd, and on the April night when Cahill gave his supper that is what occurred.

His party consisted of his daughter Ruth, an only child; William Byrne, the son of an old friend of Cahill's whom he had taken as a child of some six years and raised as his ward; Mr. and Mrs. Van Besant, intimate friends; Miss Vivian Martin, a friend of Miss Cahill's, and her fiancé, Mr. Courtney Lang. The members of the party were well known to each other and all were on intimate terms.

They arrived from the theater slightly after eleven o'clock, and were led to their table by the manager himself—a man who knew Judge Cahill well and picked up his party as soon as it entered the door. They took their places, and the serving of a prearranged menu began. Every one seemed in the happiest of humors, except possibly Byrne, who, Miss Martin afterward confessed, had struck her throughout the whole evening as being at times, as she expressed it, " morose."

The bubble dance came on, and Cahill's party ceased its cross-fire of repartee and chatter, to watch.

The leading dancer was a girl of somewhat striking appearance—slender and exceedingly graceful, with a sensitive, nervous, and decidedly piquant face. In her clinging draperies and bared feet, with the bobbing balloons all about her, she made a remarkably fetching appearance. And as she began the solo part of the song, preliminary to the dance and chorus, she looked straight into young Byrne's face. The forced smile of the performer altered slightly as though in recognition. She bent a trifle forward and floated one of her captive toys on its string, directly toward him.

" Know her?" Lang questioned, noting the by-play.

Byrne nodded: " Slightly."

" Who is she?" Courtney asked.

" Millicent Mann is the name she goes by," Byrne told him as though more or less annoyed by his pressing of the question. " They call her Milly Mann. *Nom de guerre* of her profession, I guess."

As he spoke, Cahill's face darkened swiftly. " Gad, sir," he broke out in a

manner of quick expostulation, "do you mean you've added women of this type to your other recent digressions?"

And Byrne's eyebrows twitched slightly together as he answered in a lowered tone as though indirectly seeking to allay the discussion: "Not to any great extent."

The main lights of the café went out before Cahill could answer, and the whirling calciums came on. The dancers took up the chorus, "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles," and what seemed a sympathetic whirling with the lights. Their draperies spread, appeared to intermingle and blend —they tossed their captive bubbles up and out and about them, with a rising and falling flash of slender arms and graceful, rounded limbs.

Then the thing was over and the balloons were being passed around. Milly Mann came quickly toward Cahill's table as the clapping of hands broke out.

"Hello, Billy," she said, smiling, and offered him a handful of the toys. Every one at the table took one except Cahill himself, who shook his head and continued to smoke. Applause was still rippling through the room, and the dancers were making their way toward the exit in the tentative way performers adopt when expecting an encore—because there was always an encore to the bubble dance, and already the orchestra was lifting its instruments to sound their return.

The music throbbed out. Once more Milly Mann and her support appeared. Supplied with fresh balloons, they took the floor and repeated the dance.

When the music came again to an end, the little dancer approached the Cahill table for the second time.

"Many happy returns of the day, judge," she said, gasping a bit as it seemed from her exertions and thrust the cord of one of her balloons into his unexpecting hand.

For a moment Cahill frowned, and then —he dipped his fingers into a pocket. "Thanks," he said in a tone of indifferent emotion and handed her a dollar.

Byrne grinned. "That's right, Uncle Andy, get into the spirit," he made comment on his senior's action.

"It matches the color of your new car, you know," said Milly Mann, and ran off smiling.

"Eh?" Lang exclaimed, eying the toy the judge was holding. "I say, Billy—is your little friend color-blind?"

"I don't know her well enough to hazard an opinion," said Byrne with a glance at Ruth Cahill, and speaking rather shortly.

"His little friend is brazen," Cahill pronounced gruffly. "Her character probably matches this more closely than its color does my machine." For the tiny globe of the toy he was holding gleamed under the lights a vivid scarlet, rather than a green.

Once more Byrne's face clouded. For an instant he seemed on the verge of making a retort. But already the sound of bursting balloons, the little half screams of assumed feminine surprise, were filling the length and breadth of the room. As Cahill replaced his cigar in his mouth after his last remark, his ward put aside any reply he might have had in mind to the other's comment on the dancer and plainly sought to lighten what was threatening to prove a marring incident to the evening.

"Come on," he suggested instead; "let's blow up our bubbles and see which one bursts first." He lifted his own and set its mouth-piece to his lips. "You suck the air out first—and then blow 'em up hard and keep on blowing."

Lang nodded. "Quite so. Good test for the lungs."

Mrs. Van Besant had already deflated her balloon and was waiting. "Come, judge; aren't you going to play the game with us?" she prompted, noting that Cahill made no move toward joining in the spirit of the moment.

CHAPTER II.

CAHILL'S CORPSE.

THEN and then only the district attorney seemed to collect himself and realize his duties as a host. "Certainly, certainly, my dear Mrs. Van," he replied, placed the mouth-piece of the red balloon to his lips and deflated it with a deep-drawn inhalation.

"All ready—go!" young Byrne commanded.

The tiny globes began to swell in size around the table. Judge Andrew Cahill's was the first to burst. It exploded with a soft popping sound of rending fabric, and left a few crimson tatters, and the tiny mouth-piece in his hand.

The morning after his fifty-ninth birthday District Attorney Cahill was discovered dead in bed.

Aside from its unexpectedness, there was nothing so very unusual in that mere fact. Many a man no older than Cahill had died suddenly at work or in the night. Some unsuspected organic lesion has finally reached a stage where it throws out of joint the human machine. A late and heavy meal has even been sufficient at times to bring about an abrupt cessation of the vital forces. And it was to some such view that the family physician at first inclined.

But it was not such an explanation as Miss Ruth Cahill felt inclined to accept. Somewhat distracted, strung to a high nervous tension by the sudden loss of her father, of whom she had thought as much as a child may think of a sterling parent, she insisted that he had not died of a dietary indiscretion and that he had never complained of his heart in all his life.

As rather supporting her contention, it was at least certain that Cahill had seemed in the very best of health on the day preceding the night in the course of which he died. Of course, at the time, no one suspected foul play. There was nothing to indicate anything save a natural death. Cahill, when found by his man—he maintained a rather elaborate establishment, with a private secretary of his own, being a man of wealth—seemed to have passed without a struggle; to have actually died in his sleep. He lay flat on his back beneath coverings undisturbed. The only thing unnatural, and that noted by the family physician, was a slightly bloated appearance of the face.

Perkes, the valet, drew his master's bath that morning as usual and went in to call him. After that he gave the astonishing alarm.

Ruth, wakened from her sleep by her maid, flung on a kimono and rushed to her father's chamber, flinging herself upon the body and calling him over and over by a lifelong, accustomed pet name.

Byrne came next, lifting her gently from that first frantic despair of bereavement which left her wholly an orphan, and seeking to comfort her to what extent he could. Man and woman had known each other, grown up together since childhood, Ruth being a child of two when Byrne came to make Cahill's house his home. So it was not odd that he should have led her out of the room when the first pang was exhausted in a measure, and have told her gently to go dress herself, while she waited for the verdict of the family physician whom Stephen George, Cahill's secretary, had already called.

Nor was it surprising that she should have instinctively turned to the brown-haired, gray-eyed man she had known from childhood, for support, or that he should have been present when the doctor explained to her his theory of her father's death—that wholly natural theory, from a medical standpoint, which she refused to accept.

"His heart wasn't affected—at least, he never complained of it, as you ought to know, doctor; and he—he didn't die of—of gluttony," she declared, almost as though refuting some imputation as against the man whose body lay stretched out in its handsome bed.

"But, Miss Ruth, there is scarcely room for any other assumption," the physician returned, striving at one time to support his own contention and allay what appeared in the girl before him as a form of sentimental offense. "Admitting that I have never heard your father complain of a cardiac affection or detected anything of the sort on examination, yet he has not been to me for a long time for attention—"

"Exactly," Miss Cahill interrupted. "He didn't need attention. He was a perfectly healthy man."

"I was about to point out that some trouble might have developed and remained obscured," the man of medicine resumed, ignoring the tense opposition of the dead

man's daughter. "It is the only tenable supposition. It must have been something of the sort."

"Something?" Ruth Cahill retorted, and turned to Byrne. "Billy—I'm not satisfied with a diagnosis of 'something.' Isn't there some way of really finding out?"

"A post mortem might show," the doctor said in a somewhat more formal manner than he had as yet used, before Byrne could speak.

Ruth nodded. "A post mortem," she repeated, and Byrne cut into her further words:

"Ruth—Ruth dear."

"Why not?" she went on, unmindful of his protest. "Daddy Drew wouldn't care—now—and something—Billy—something tells me we ought to find out." The name she used was the name she had always used in their softer moments with her father——the last half of his given name of Andrew—and as she spoke it her voice broke sharply; she turned and leaned her head against Byrne's shoulder, and began for the first time to sob.

"If it is desired, I can, of course, arrange it," said the doctor. "But it seems to me that Miss Ruth is very much overwrought. She had best lie down and remain quiet for an hour." Having given which excellent advice, he left the house.

All these things I have told in the past tense, because they were things we learned after Police Inspector Johnson had called us into the case.

And the reason for that was that Ruth Cahill insisted on a private agency to handle the matter, after she knew the true reason of her father's death. Faced by her demands, Johnson at once suggested "Glace and Bryce," because we had worked on more than one case together, and Bryce, my partner, before we organized our firm, had been a member of the police.

That wasn't until later in the afternoon, however, and in the mean time fate—or the law of cause and effect—the law which makes out of every action, every incident of no matter how trivial a seeming, but one step in the cumulative course of some incident of human life, as you may prefer to regard it—had been at work.

For Ruth Cahill did not waver in her determination to have an autopsy performed with the view of learning the true nature of her father's death. Against Byrne's urging, against the suggestion of Stephen George, the dead man's secretary, who joined Byrne in trying to divert her from the rather gruesome undertaking, she took a determined stand and remained firm.

And as a result of that the matter was arranged. The body was taken quietly to an undertaking parlor, and there the family physician and a young surgeon, recently returned from service in France with the American forces, carried out her decision upon Andrew Cahill's remains.

When their task was completed, they left the mortician's with grave faces and, entering the older man's machine, drove swiftly to the Cahill house.

All Ruth said when they had made their report was:

"I knew it. Something told me. Will you call the police, please, Billy?"

Byrne telephoned the central station, and the younger surgeon waited the coming of Inspector Johnson.

When he arrived he gave him his verdict in a few positive words:

"Andrew Cahill had died from the effects of phosgene gas; first used by Germany against the allied armies, and one of the deadliest as well as one of the most insidious agents known for the taking of human life."

CHAPTER III.

RUTH TAKES THE CHAIR.

JOHNSON began his investigation with a lot of questions, and it was then that Miss Cahill made her demand for other aid in handling the matter of her father's murder, rather than leaving it solely in the hands of the police. It being wholly within her province to do so, Johnson assented with such grace as he could muster and suggested calling us in. At her request he himself telephoned our office and asked that we lose no time in reaching the Cahill home.

Naturally we complied at once. Cahill's

death had been in the afternoon editions of all the papers, and it looked to us as though we were being called to a rather big thing.

A taxi put us down in front of the mansion—one of the finest on that street of fashionable mansions—Park Drive.

A somber-faced servitor admitted us and led us into the room Andrew Cahill had used as his own particular sanctum. It was past five in the evening, and a slow fire burned in a grate beyond a great flat-topped desk at which the dead man had been wont to work.

In fact, the place was a workroom, as I saw at the first glance. A typewriter and desk stood close by the larger desk in the center of the apartment. Cases of books of a legal nature lined the walls.

Johnson sat there, with Byrne and a second man of rather sandy complexion, and Ruth Cahill, as I learned when the inspector had introduced us. I passed the men by with a casual inspection and gave my attention to the girl.

She was small on first impression, with a mass of waving brown hair drawn down low above the oval of a face somewhat heavy lidded with grief. But there were no tears in the dark eyes she turned upon me. And there were lines of a voluntary control about what I felt would have been otherwise a very charmingly chiseled mouth.

She sat in a great leather chair, half engulfed in its roomy depths. Byrne was sitting bolt upright, in a rather rigid posture on a straight-backed chair. Stephen George sat as though by custom in front of the writing machine. Johnson got out of an easy seat to make the introductions and resumed it as we found chairs. I mention the details merely to give a notion of the scene.

Miss Cahill spoke first. Despite her slender physique, she seemed to be the center of the picture—to dominate that meeting. "Mr. Johnson explained in requesting your presence, Mr. Glace?"

"I inclined my head to the question: "Yes, Miss Cahill."

"It is in no sense a reflection upon his ability," she went on quickly, "but because of something my father has often told me, that I asked him to call you in. Daddy Drew"—her voice faltered for the span of a single breath—"always held the opinion that the police are more or less given to routine, and that is why they so often are baffled by some unusual case. It was largely because of his views on such things that I had an autopsy performed upon him. He often said to me that he felt sure many a real crime had been covered up by—a verdict of natural death. I—it was because of that I took the steps that resulted in the discovery of the terrible truth in regard to himself. Consequently I want you to work *with* Mr. Johnson and—spare no effort—or expense."

It was a remarkably logical summary of the situation to date as well as a clean-cut presentation of her attitude in the matter, I thought, as she paused and sat waiting my response, her two hands gripping the arms of the great chair, a cloud of grief and sorrowful speculation in her darkly brooding eyes.

"We shall do everything possible as soon as we are in touch with the facts, Miss Cahill," I replied.

"Of course," she said simply and went rapidly on with a résumé of what had occurred on the evening preceding her father's death.

Johnson cleared his throat as she finished. "And I reckon now, Miss Cahill, th' first thing we'd better do, is take a look at his room."

Ruth Cahill threw up her head with an alert, nervous gesture. "For what purpose? My father's body was discovered there this morning, but it is not the scene of the murder. It is merely the place where he died."

Plainly Johnson hadn't expected any such response to his suggestion and he seemed a trifle flustered by Miss Cahill's opposition. "I reckon you mean—" he began rather gruffly.

"I mean that I know how phosgene gas performs its deadly mission," Miss Cahill cut him short. "I talked to Dr. Rogers while we were waiting for your coming. It takes hours to affect its victim. It is odorless, tasteless—a man may be poisoned by it and not even sense the fact for hours—and then—without warning—all at once—

he dies." She tensed her arms and drew herself up till she sat on the edge of the great chair. Her voice grew suddenly vibrant, taut as the string of a violin. "And —we know why he died and how that terrible poison was given. It was inside that balloon!"

"Ruth!" said Byrne, speaking for the first time quickly.

She turned her eyes toward him, her words came as sharply distinct as those of a judge pronouncing sentence: "That little red balloon placed in his hands by the woman you say is called Milly Mann."

"Admitting the possibility of such a thing—" Byrne said slowly.

Ruth Cahill smiled. It was an odd facial contortion—such a writhing of the lips as might result on a face from a self-inflicted pain. "Possibility!" she interrupted his tentative rejoinder. "It is the only logical explanation of what happened last night, unless you all are blind."

"But we all had balloons," Byrne stammered.

Once more Miss Cahill regarded him for a slow dragging moment of silence, until at last she asked:

"Do you think it was not—arranged?"

And then suddenly, without any warning, she turned her head and addressed me: "Isn't it clear to you—don't you see it, Mr. Glace? Don't you see the diabolical cleverness of the whole dreadful plan—to—to—reach him in so seemingly innocent a fashion? It wasn't air. It was that awful gas with which it was inflated, and —he—he drew in his death when he emptied it after Billy had suggested bursting them and Mrs. Van Besant asked him if he wouldn't join in the game. Don't you see how it happened? Isn't it plain?"

"Why, yes, Miss Cahill, I think it is in all probability the explanation," I admitted, more than a little surprised at her lucid insight into the situation, and beginning to think Cahill's daughter had, both by inheritance and association with her father, developed a most surprisingly straight thinking mind.

"Then, why don't you go see what that girl has to say? I don't say she's more than an accomplice, but why don't you get her story instead of wasting time here in useless questions?" she exclaimed.

I glanced at Johnson, who nodded.

"That is a very good suggestion, it seems to me," I said and rose. "But first let me ask a little additional information. Presupposing that the poison gas was actually in the balloon, we are forced to the conclusion that whoever was responsible for its preparation had prior knowledge of Judge Cahill's intent to be present in the café last night. By whom was the supper arranged?"

"By me." For the first time I heard Stephen George's voice. It was surprisingly deep and heavy, if one considered the secretary's stature. "Judge Cahill asked me to arrange the details and I attended to it for him, Monday"

I nodded. "Judge Cahill selected the Kenton Grill for the occasion?" I suggested.

George looked me steadily in the eye. "I suppose one might answer that in the affirmative," he returned. "He did so indirectly at least. As a matter of fact, however, I happened to be present when he was discussing it with Mr. Byrne and it was Mr. Byrne mentioned that there would be quite a spectacular number at the Kenton Grill this week."

I turned to Cahill's ward. "You knew of it in advance?" I asked.

He nodded in an almost reluctant fashion.

"Milly Mann tell you?" Bryce interjected a question.

Byrne jerked his head around and sat staring at Jim as though considering his answer. "Yes. Miss Mann told me this week's program," he said at last.

"When?" Jim demanded.

"Last Saturday night," Byrne told him.

Bryce gave Johnson and me a glance and got up. "All right," he said. "Let's get along."

We left the house, with a promise to report any developments we might discover. Johnson had come over in a police car and we all piled in.

"This is just about the darnedest thing yet," the inspector remarked as we started. "But—I shouldn't wonder if th' girl had

picked the answer as to how th' trick was turned."

"She's a stem-winder," Bryce declared, plainly referring to Miss Cahill. "Most women would be havin' hysterics at a time like this, but not her. She's keeping cool as ice and using her thinking machine. She might be th' judge himself from the way she sized up this proposition. Just who's this Milly Mann?"

"Dancer—professional. That's all I know about her," Johnson replied. "That's what makes the deal seem funny. What was back of her handing him the balloon in the first place? She must have known what was in it, but—she must have known we'd spot her play."

"Not necessarily," I suggested. "The chances are they counted on Cahill's death being assigned to heart failure or something of the sort, just as it nearly was."

Johnson nodded. "Yes, by granny. They counted on a clean bit of work and no trouble. Well, maybe they'll get a surprise." Abruptly he spoke to the chauffeur. "Stop here, Jerry. Hold up!"

The car ground to a stand with a whining of brakes at the sudden order. I looked my question, and Johnson gave the explanation of his actions.

"Martin's house. Miss Vivian was in that party. It won't do any harm to find out how her story matches up with what Miss Cahill told us, I guess."

CHAPTER IV.

A RED OR GREEN BALLOON?

WE climbed out, mounted the steps of the Martin home and preferred a request for Miss Martin, trusting that we would gain our object, in view of the fact that we came from the police.

Seated in a reception parlor, we waited until Miss Martin herself came in.

She was a tall, willowy type of blonde, with a perfectly self-possessed bearing, who greeted us in strictly formal manner and waved us back to our seats as she herself sat down.

"You wished to see me, gentlemen?" she said in tentative fashion.

"Yes, Miss Martin," Johnson accepted the opening. "You were in Judge Cahill's party last night?"

"Yes." Vivian Martin answered without any hesitation. "His death was terribly shocking. I am going over this evening to be with Ruth."

Johnson rapidly sketched what we already knew of the events of the previous evening. "Is there anything you can add to th' story, Miss Martin?" he made an end.

"No, nothing." While he spoke, Miss Martin's face had lost some of its color. I noted a sudden, startled widening of her eyes. Plainly she had not known Cahill's death had actually been a murder. "I—that seems a very concise account of what really occurred," she added comment to her first denial.

"Just who is this Byrne, anyway?" Bryce asked as she paused.

"Billy!" She turned her eyes toward him almost as though surprised by his interrogation. "Why—he is Judge Cahill's ward. The judge took him as a child when his father died. He and the judge had been chums since they were boys. The judge was the trustee of Billy's money."

"Much of it?" Jim shot in quickly.

"Why"—Miss Martin hesitated for the first time in her answers—"I believe there was quite an estate."

The cross-fire of questions gave me a sudden thought. "Miss Martin, was there or is there anything between young Byrne and Miss Cahill?" I inquired.

And all at once she smiled. "Before Billy went into service, they were tacitly engaged."

"Byrne has been in service?" I said.

"Oh, yes. You know he's really awfully clever. He was in the gas and flame work almost from the first."

I saw a glance pass between Bryce and Johnson—a quick thing of comprehension, and then: "And since his return, have things been the same between him and Miss Cahill?" I asked.

Miss Martin seemed a trifle embarrassed. "Why—don't you think that is a rather delicate question?" She evaded a direct answer.

"Admitting that it is, this is a matter of life and death and we are seeking information, Miss Martin," I replied.

Her well-penciled brows contracted slightly. "I don't know," she said. "I've heard nothing about it. Of course, there was that little episode of the judge taking him to task for knowing the Mann girl, of which you know already. Ruth didn't like it, as I could tell from her manner, and Billy was plainly embarrassed. But he wasn't himself at all last evening. He—he seemed what one might call 'morose'—as though something were on his mind."

For a fleeting moment I had a mental picture of a slender girl in a great chair in her father's study and the way she had looked at Byrne when she had spoken of the cabaret woman. "Apparently," I said because of that, "Judge Cahill did not previously know of the acquaintance between young Byrne and Miss Mann?"

"Apparently not," Miss Martin assented.

"Was there any trouble between the judge and his ward, Miss Martin?"

"Not that I know of," she replied with a deep-drawn breath. "We have all thought the judge was very proud of Billy, rather than the reverse."

I looked at Johnson and he got to his feet. We left the house and made our way back to the car.

"What th' devil," said Jim as we headed for the Kenton. "Byrne was in the gas and flame service. Don't they—"

"Handle poison gas? You're right Jim. There's a nigger somewhere in this particular wood pile," Johnson growled. "And after we've seen this Mann skirt, we're going back to Cahill's house and see Stephen George."

"Th' secretary?" said Jim.

Johnson nodded. "Sure—th' secretary. If there was anything out of kelter between th' judge and Byrne, it's a safe bet th' secretary knows."

Jerry stopped the car at the Kenton entrance. We got out and went in. The tea hour was past and the dinner crowd hadn't more than begun to gather. Johnson preferred a request for the manager of the café that brought him hurrying to us.

"Sloan," said the inspector, "I suppose you know Cahill died last night, but—do you know he was murdered?"

"Murdered?" The man started back, his eyes widening in an involuntary fashion of startled amazement. "My God, inspector, what do you mean?"

"Come where we can talk it over and I'll tell you," Johnson suggested.

Sloan nodded and led us to a little boxed-in office, quite evidently his own.

And there Johnson put him in touch with the facts and ended with a couple of questions: "Now where do we see the girl, and who has charge of giving out those balloons?"

Sloan's face was a pasty pallor of horror and indefinite suspicion as Johnson came to an end. He wiped it on a kerchief before he answered. "Milly's in a room here in the hotel, inspector—only I can't believe she knew what she was doing. She's been here as usual this afternoon. But—of course, I'll take you to her. As for the balloons—they are prepared in advance of the number, every evening in the costume and property room. I can't see how such a terrible thing could happen."

"Neither can we—yet," said Johnson. "Suppose you take us up to th' girl's room and we'll see what we can find out without wastin' any more time."

Sloan nodded. He rose and led the way to the elevator bank of cages. We went up to the top floor of the hotel and down a corridor to the rear. And there Sloan himself rapped on the panels of a door. Little beads of moisture dampened his forehead and the sickly pallor still made an unwholesome thing on his face.

"Who's there?" A feminine voice replied to his knock.

"It's—Sloan, Milly," he answered. "Open th' door. Somethin's happened. I got to see you at once."

Footsteps sounded lightly from within the room. A key grated. The door was drawn open to show a young woman, blond and slender, clad in a blue kimono, with a pair of pink satin mules upon her feet.

At sight of us standing there she half thrust the door shut with what seemed an

instinctive gesture and then, as Sloan threw his weight against it, started back with a gasp of surprise.

"Milly," he said, "this is Inspector Johnson of th' police, an' Glace an' Byrce, detectives. They want to see you Milly. Cahill's dead."

"Cahill?" the girl repeated. "You mean Judge Cahill, Larry? I know; it was in the papers. But—what have th' police got to do with that?"

"He was poisoned—they think you poisoned him, Milly," the manager stammered.

"*I* did?" The hand holding the kimono about the girl's figure tightened. Her eyelids flickered.

"Well, anyway, you gave the poison to him." Johnson shut the door and stood with his back against it. "Last night in th' café. It was in that red balloon."

And for a long moment after that Milly Mann and the inspector stood staring at one another, the policeman heavy, seemingly unmoved, implacable in his position against the door, stolid; the girl beginning to pant somewhat with the quickening rise and fall of her rounded busts under the silk she clutched together above them, until: "What red balloon are you talking about?" she asked.

"Th' one you brought out and gave him durin' th' encore, Milly," said Johnson with a heavy slowness that made of each word a verbal club to beat down a shaken control and crush out an admission.

But, quite surprisingly, before that positive attack, supported by definite knowledge, Miss Mann remained unshaken. To my ears, strained for her reply, there seemed a note of relief in her answer:

"I guess right there is where you alibi me, inspector. I don't know anything about a red balloon at all. It was a green one I gave him last night."

CHAPTER V.

WHO WAS THE WAITER?

"GREEN?" Johnson left his place by the door and advanced a heavy pace toward her. His jaw thrust forward. "Don't try any stall like that. There was six other people at that table an' they say th' thing was red."

"An' I say it was green," Miss Mann retorted. "Why—see here—if those folks want to remember, I told him it would match th' color of his new car when I gave it to him—an' if it was red I'd 'a' been a fool to pull a thing like that."

Johnson nodded. "Yep. They thought it was foolish at th' time. One of 'em suggested you might be color blind."

"Color blind?" The girl's face twitched, her lips pressed together. All at once she seemed vaguely troubled. And then she caught herself up. "Look here—there's a book over there on that table"—she flung out a hand in a directing gesture—"and it's red, an'—that's a green ribbon on the dresser. I guess that settles that."

For the second time Johnson nodded. "I reckon it does, an' I reckon it knocks your alibi at the same time. So what's the use of lyin'? Who gave you that balloon to give Judge Cahill? Come across."

Milly Mann shivered. A tremor shook her from head to foot. Her lips parted. "I—" she began and suddenly turned to Sloan. "Larry!" she faltered. "Oh, Larry—oh, my God!"

Sloan slipped an arm about her. "Go easy, inspector," he said thickly. "She ain't been very well of late—so—if you'll just go easy—she'll tell you what happened, as long as you don't try to rush her too hard. Sit down, Milly, and take it easy." He led her to a chair. And then his voice rose in a sort of exasperated rumble. "There's something funny about this whole damned business. Now then, Milly, you tell th' inspector just what happened."

"I—I—don't know," Miss Mann faltered. "I—never even had th' least suspicion anything was wrong. I—I knew Judge Cahill, of course. You know, when he was made district attorney he gave out he was going to clean up the town, and he's always dropping into places like the Grill to see what's going on. So—well—we've all got to know him pretty well by sight, and last night I saw him at his table when I first went on, and after the number I offered him a balloon and he turned it down, just before we went off."

"You knew young Byrne, his ward, too, didn't you?" Jim inquired as she paused and caught a somewhat unsteady breath.

"Why—yes." She turned her glance toward him.

"Speak to him last night?"

"I—why I said—'Hello, Billy,' when I was giving out the balloons. I offered the judge one because I'd covered the rest of the table. But—I didn't think anything of his not taking it, because he never does do anything like that when he comes here. He just smokes and looks on."

"Know Miss Ruth Cahill?" said Jim softly.

"His daughter?" Miss Mann shook her head. "No—but I'm sorry for her. I guess this will leave her all alone, won't it?"

Jim nodded. "You seem to be wise to quite a lot of the family history," he suggested.

"Oh, but Billy—" the girl began and paused.

"Billy told you, huh?" Bryce finished her broken sentence. "All right. What happened after you went off?"

"Why—we didn't go off really, only just back to where the waiters' service stairs comes down from the private rooms. We were waitin' for the encore—there always was an encore, you know. An' when we stopped, waitin' for th' music, there was a waiter standin' there an' he had a green balloon in his hand."

"Th' waiter had it?" Johnson cut in quickly.

Miss Mann nodded. "Yes. An' he says to me: 'Th' judge don't seem very festive for his birthday, does he? Here, give him this, an' tell him many happy returns. Tell him it's the color of his new car an' maybe he'll give you a tip.' An' with that he shoves the thing into my hand."

"And," Johnson emphasized as she once more paused for breath, "it was green?"

Milly Mann looked him full in the eye. "Yes, it was," she affirmed.

The inspector scowled. "All right," he said gruffly. "An' you knew this waiter. What was his name?"

Miss Mann's eyes widened swiftly. She shook her head in emphatic denial. "Why, no, I didn't know him, but I didn't think anything of that. You know, there's a strike on, an' we're running with what we can get. But he was standin' there at th' foot of th' service stairs, an' I didn't give much thought to the matter. Th' encore was playin' an' there wasn't time."

"So," Johnson said, "you just went out and gave the judge the balloon?"

"Why, yes—and he gave me a dollar."

"Could you describe the waiter at least, Miss Mann?" I took a hand in her interrogation.

"He was slender, with a thin face, an' sort of mouse-colored hair, I guess you'd call it, an' sort of greenish eyes."

"What do you mean by mouse-colored?" I questioned.

"Why"—she frowned—"it was a funny sort of color. I didn't notice it closely an' maybe it was the lights, but it was a sort of dirty drab."

"And now, Miss Mann," I said, picking up something neither Bryce nor Johnson seemed to notice, "what is this about your being in bad health?"

"Oh," she made answer quickly, "I'm not really sick, but—we work a lot harder than anybody thinks in this game, an' recently I've been having trouble with my nerves."

Johnson took hold again before I could ask another question. "See here. You say you knew Cahill by sight through his comin' here on those scoutin' trips he was always takin'. Now—did you happen to know last night he was goin' to be in th' café?"

"Last night, you mean?" Miss Mann inquired quickly.

"Yes."

"Why—" she hesitated briefly. "Yes, I did."

"Who told you?"

"Mr. Byrne."

"When?"

"Th' first of the week."

"Did you see Byrne last Saturday—a week ago to-day—and tell him th' bubble dance was comin' off this week?"

"Why, yes."

Byrne had said as much himself before

we came here. But of course the girl didn't know that, and her expression was becoming rapidly puzzled as well as troubled by the line the inspector was taking. She glanced from one to the other of us as though seeking to fathom the purpose behind it.

"How long have you known Byrne?" Bryce asked.

"About a month," said Milly. "I—I met him one night when he came in here alone late and asked me to sit down at his table. He—he was still in uniform then, and I didn't think anything of it. But since then we generally speak when he comes in."

Johnson waited until she was done and then resumed: "An' you say your nerves have been bad?"

"Yes—but I've been taking treatment, and managed to go on."

And suddenly the inspector grinned with appreciation of what he evidently intended as a sort of grim humor. "Rest is th' best cure for nerves," he declared. "Sloan, you get your house-man up here and make him responsible till I send over for her. I'm goin' to take her in."

Plainly he didn't put much faith in her story and considered her an accomplice at least in the crime. And certainly her narrative held much that suggested a tale made up on the minute—such as her taking the balloon to Cahill in hopes of a tip, and her vague and unsatisfactory description of an unknown waiter with green eyes and mouse-colored hair.

None the less, his words seemed to have an actually paralyzing effect on Milly Mann for a moment and then she turned to Sloan: "Larry—" she began and broke off and whirled back to the inspector: "You mean you're going to have me arrested—that you don't believe me—"

"Well," Johnson said as he jerked his head toward the door, thereby prompting Sloan to get the hotel detective, "I'm believin' your nerves are pretty bad, all right, Milly. They got to be when you begin to think red is green. But—your nerve is all right yet, I guess," he added in sarcastic fashion. "Run along. It ain't any use to start your chin going, Sloan."

Ten minutes later we left the Kenton and reentered Johnson's car. The hotel detective had come up and was posted outside Milly Mann's door and Johnson had telephoned the central station to send over a man to escort her across to the jail.

"And now get back to Cahill's as quick as the old boat will let you," he directed Jerry, leaned back in his seat and accepted one of Jim's cigars. He set it afire and sat drawing rather viciously on it. None of us spoke while Jerry made the run to Cahill's. It was rather difficult as yet to discuss the affair.

But Bryce did finally speak just before we reached the dead man's mansion: "Is there any sort of nerve trouble will make red look green?"

Johnson's comment was terse in the extreme. The car was just slowing to come to a stand at the curb. He flung his half-finished cigar overboard with a grimace, and what he said was: "Aw, hell!"

After that there didn't seem to be anything worth saying. The car stopped, we climbed down and went up the walk from the street to the Cahill doors.

Our admission was instant. There was no formality about it. Plainly we had been hoped for if not expected. Miss Cahill hurried to greet us at once. Her face was a mask of expectation, which changed subtly to vague question and something like consternation at the inspector's request for a private interview with Stephen George.

"What—what have you learned?" she stammered with less composure than she had exhibited during the late afternoon.

Johnson shook his head in a denial of her urging. "Not now, Miss Cahill," he made answer. "Maybe I'll have somethin' to say after I've seen your father's confidential man."

"He's in the study." Ruth Cahill yielded to his partial promise and turned to lead us back to the room where she had received us first. "Stephen," she said as she opened the door and ushered us into the apartment, "Mr. Johnson wishes to talk with you concerning what has happened. Give him any assistance you can."

Stephen George rose. Seemingly he had

been at work filing papers at the desk where Cahill had been accustomed to work. He waited without a word until we were seated and then again sat down. He made no response or sign to Ruth Cahill's words save a slight bow as she closed the door and vanished. His attitude was one of deliberate waiting until Johnson began:

"Mr. George, how were things between Byrne and his guardian since his return from service? Did they clash or did things go smooth?"

For a moment longer George maintained his silence and then he said rather oddly: "I suppose you want the truth?"

"Well say—" Johnson's tone was startled.

"One moment, inspector." George raised a well-kept hand in a staying gesture. "You want it, and apparently so does Miss Ruth. Consequently I shall tell it. Things were not harmonious between Mr. Byrne and my late employer. Since his return Mr. Byrne's course was not one of which Judge Cahill could approve."

CHAPTER VI.

GUARDIAN VS. WARD.

"ON the loose?" said Johnson.

George shook his head. "He was having merely a bit of a fling, in my estimation, but Judge Cahill was desirous of his settling down at some definite employment. Things never came to what we might call a head, however, until possibly ten days ago." He paused briefly and then continued. "Are you aware that Mr. Byrne and Miss Ruth are unpublicly engaged?"

Johnson nodded.

"Then you will understand when I say that Judge Cahill told his ward that the engagement would be broken off by his decision unless he followed his wishes in regard to his behavior. You may also be aware that the judge was trustee of Mr. Byrne's estate, and that the will was so written that Mr. Byrne received no more than the income from it until Judge Cahill was satisfied of the good faith of his endeavors in whatever undertaking he might engage, unless Judge Cahill should die before Mr. Byrne was thirty years of age. Indeed, it was Mr. Byrne's more or less frequent requests for money that brought things to a crisis, I believe."

"What was he doin'—feedin' it to the chickens?" Johnson asked.

"I hardly think he was doing anything very culpable at all, outside of spending considerable money in having a good time," George replied. "He'd been under stiff discipline for two years nearly and I considered his desire to run about more a reaction than anything else. It was rather unfortunate, however, that last night the judge saw him recognize a cabaret performer in the café."

"How unfortunate?" I inquired as he paused and Johnson hesitated for a question.

"Because," said Stephen George, "after the return of the party it was the cause of a bitter scene between Judge Cahill and his ward. He accused Mr. Byrne of things you may imagine, purely on supposition, and wouldn't accept his assertion that his acquaintance with the girl in question held nothing wrong. They actually quarreled last night for the first time in their lives. In the end, Mr. Byrne told him to turn over his property to him and he'd be gone."

"Leave the house, you mean?" said Johnson.

"Yes," said Stephen George.

"Byrne was in the flame and gas service?" Bryce took a hand in the conversation.

"Yes."

"I reckon you know they handled poison gases."

"Of course," George assented. "But—you can't mean— Good God! See here—there's nothing to that. Byrne isn't that sort of man." For the first time, something like excitement showed in the man's hitherto almost colorless tones.

Johnson nodded. "Well, you know him better than I do, but, what did Cahill say when he asked for his money?"

One of George's hands contracted. I noted the movement. "He refused, as under the will he could refuse to turn it

over until Mr. Byrne had become thirty years of age."

"And how about Miss Cahill—was her name mentioned?"

"The judge told him he could consider the engagement as ended—that he would not consent to his daughter marrying a man of whom he did not approve."

"Just so," said Johnson quickly. "And did she know of this quarrel?"

"I hardly think so. She had retired to her room before the thing occurred."

"And what did Cahill say to Byrne's threat to leave?" the inspector questioned.

"He told him not to talk like a fool."

"You were present during the row?" said Johnson.

"Yes. A matter had come up during the judge's absence and as I wished to speak with him about it, I had waited his return. Both men were rather angry and—well, they made nothing of my presence."

"And it was about ten days ago the judge began bringing things to a showdown?"

"About that, I think."

"All right." Johnson got up. "That's all, I guess. Much obliged, George, for the information."

The secretary rose also. "May I ask a question, myself, inspector?" he said, as we prepared to leave.

"Yes, what is it?" Johnson conceded to the request.

"What have you learned?"

The thing came rather oddly into an already odd situation and it froze Johnson completely. For a moment he regarded George out of somewhat narrowed eyes, and then he answered gruffly: "I've learned that a closed mouth spills no mush, my friend."

Stephen George flushed slightly, but made no answer. He was still standing as we three filed out and made our way back to a little reception-room where Ruth Cahill was waiting our coming, now in company with Byrne.

Looking back now, it seems to me as though if a mistake was made in the beginning, Johnson made it by trying to rush things that first evening. And yet the man might be excused. Apparently he had a hot trail just before his nose, and he sought to follow it up, though he couldn't tell just where it was leading at the time.

We entered the room where Ruth and Byrne were waiting and, as before, the girl's dark eyes looked the question uppermost in her mind even before her soft lips framed it.

Johnson spoke its answer almost before we had taken chairs. "To begin with, we've arrested Milly Mann, Miss Cahill, on suspicion. She tells a rather fancy story, and among other things, she sticks to the statement that she didn't give your father a red balloon at all, but that th' thing was green."

"But it wasn't. We all saw it," Miss Cahill exclaimed, while Byrne's face took on troubled lines.

"Exactly," Johnson nodded. "But she says that lately she's been havin' trouble with her nerves." He indulged in a rather unpleasant grin.

"She has, too," Byrne entered the conversation. "She's been taking treatment for them. I'm sorry you felt you had to arrest her."

"We couldn't do anything else," Johnson said, eying him directly, "after we found out that she knew your guardian would be present last night an' that you'd told her Monday yourself, after George had arranged for the party. With that much advance information, almost anything could have been arranged."

Silence, a breathless silence, followed his words for the span of a moment of comprehension, and then Byrne flared back in a voice grown strained with realization of all Johnson's answer might embrace. "Just what do you mean by that?"

And Johnson answered: "I can tell a lot better after I know how much you know about your father's will."

"I know all about it." Byrne's tones were a trifle unsteady and all at once the air was electrically tense, charged with unnamed but foreshadowed things. "Dad left his estate in trust for me with Judge Cahill. It was to be turned over to me at his discretion, provided he was satisfied with my conduct any time after I was of age. Otherwise, I was to have only the income, unless—" All at once he paused. I thought his eyelids narrowed.

"Unless what?" Johnson's voice was cold as ice.

"Unless the judge died before I was thirty," Byrne finished, and caught an audible breath.

"How old are you at present?" Johnson asked.

"Twenty-seven." Byrne rose. He stood there looking at Johnson, at Jim and me, at Ruth Cahill.

And the girl had straightened, stiffened. She was regarding him out of wide, dark, troubled eyes. She hardly seemed to breathe as she stared back at the man whom she had known for years, with whom she had grown up from childhood, who had been her accepted lover, until all at once Byrne took another rasping breath.

"Good God!" he said, and then more slowly, as the thing seemed to reach deeper into his conscious understanding, "G-o-o-d God!"

"An' th' judge didn't approve of your actions since you came back from th' service, an' recently you've been havin' trouble with him over money, an—I beg your pardon, Miss Cahill, but I gotta say this—he threatened to break things off between you an' his daughter unless you did what he wanted." Johnson spoke stolidly into the pause that followed those gasping words. "I reckon you were th' one who would have had most to gain by his death—"

"Billy!" His name cut into Johnson's finish. Ruth Cahill rose from her chair. She stood slight, dark, in her appeal as she turned toward Byrne with outstretched, groping hands.

"An' beside," Johnson pressed on to his object, "I reckon you didn't fail to get wise to phosgene gas in your work with gas an' flame."

"You damned hound!" In a flash all Byrne's control seemed to vanish and with it went his conventional language, releasing such speech as he might have used toward an enemy of that service in which he had been—or the cause it represented. He took a swift step toward the inspector, half flexing his arms as though for a sudden physical refutation of the implication.

"Billy!" Ruth Cahill screamed.

Byrne faltered in his attack.

Jim and I had started up, and Johnson's hand had crept back suspiciously near to a certain pocket. Byrne stood there glaring at him and his hand.

"You fool—" he broke out all at once, and turned to the girl, catching her hands, drawing her to him, sweeping her inside his arms and holding her with the clutching, gripping embrace of a passionate denial. "Ruth—I didn't—as God is my judge, I didn't do it—Ruth. You don't believe it—"

She freed herself and stepped back. Her face was a pallid mask. "I don't want to believe it—I'd rather die than believe it," she said with the clear, cold enunciation that sometimes goes with straining nerves. "But—the gas was in that balloon, and you know that *woman*. You'll—Billy—you'll have to prove it before I shall know a moment's calm."

"Ruth!" Byrne's eyes were heavy as he let them rest upon her, standing there so slender, so rigid, so implacable before him. And the sound of the thing was as though the man had groaned.

Then, quite unexpectedly, he whirled again on Johnson.

"All right," he said in a wholly different, an almost reckless fashion. "I get what you're driving at, inspector, and the best way to prove you wrong is to give you a chance to prove it. No need to put on the handcuffs; I'll go with you—word of a soldier."

Johnson nodded. "That's good enough, Mr. Byrne," he accepted. "I got a car outside, so—if you're ready, come along."

CHAPTER VII.

THE NURSE OF SUSPICION.

THAT was the state of things when Bryce and I decided to carry the matter of Andrew Cahill's death to Semi-Dual—that strange friend of ours, the *deus ex machinâ* of our detective endeavors, on whose advice we had first organized the firm of Glace and Bryce.

Unsatisfactory you might call the status of the mystery of Cahill's death at least. I know Johnson wasn't satisfied, although

he had made two arrests mainly on suspicion. Nor was Ruth Cahill satisfied while she watched Byrne led away by the inspector. I know that, even though she never batted a lash as Billy went out, head up, walking rather stiffly; because, as Jim and I moved to follow, she asked us to remain.

Johnson noted our pause and half turned to see if we were coming. I told him Miss Ruth wanted to speak with us for a few moments and that we would see him in the morning. He nodded and went on with Billy.

Ruth Cahill's lips curled a trifle and then set into an almost rigid line once they were gone. "It's—just like Daddy Drew said," she began speaking, as much to herself as to us, I thought: "They fall into a rut, and—arrest some one on suspicion—and then try to prove their suspicions were correct. Why don't they try to learn really! It's so easy to suspect one incorrectly, don't you think so, Mr. Glace?"

My heart went out to her in that instant. Doubly orphaned—robbed of the father who had seemingly made of her a companion, seeing her lifelong man companion, the man she had expected to marry, led off in arrest, it was, although she did not say so, almost as though in her question she cried out to me for some morsel of mental relief—some verbal stay or comfort, now at the end of this day of horror and shock and distress.

I hurried to reassure her. "It is exceedingly easy to mistake circumstantial evidence, Miss Cahill, for the real thing."

"Exactly." Her face turned toward me. She thanked me with her eyes rather than her lips. Her features were wonderfully expressive when she permitted her emotions to sway them. "That is why I insisted on calling an agent of my own to learn the truth of—of things."

I inclined my head. "We understand that, Miss Cahill, and we shall do all we can to learn. And as a beginning let me ask you a question. Did you know that last night, after your return from the café, your father and his ward had quarreled?"

For a moment her face mirrored something like consternation and then cleared. "You—that is why you wanted to see Stephen, isn't it, Mr. Glace?" She made a rapid deduction. "No—I didn't know it, but that can hardly matter now. That was *after* we came from the café, as you say yourself."

Oh, yes, she was clear-headed, was Ruth Cahill, and she picked the flaw in the bearing of the quarrel at once. I nodded. "Of course," I said smiling at her quickness. "But—there had been friction between them for some days, I understand."

"Are you trying to prove that Billy could have—could have done that dreadful thing?" she fired swiftly with a flash of her hot, dry eyes. And I was glad to see it, because even though she had let him be led off without a word to tell him whether she believed the accusation or not, I saw now in that hasty resentment of my unintended suggestion that she was far from ready to believe him guilty.

And I answered her on the instant: "By no means. I'm seeking to learn the true condition of things. Had your father ever spoken to you in regard to the course Mr. Byrne has been pursuing since his return?"

"Oh, yes," she said, in a tone that was somewhat weary. "But—I told Daddy Drew I was sure Billy was only having a good time after a very steady application to his work in the service—and I never considered it anything more than that until—" She broke off, biting her lips, and lowered her eyes.

"Until," I struck back bluntly, "you found he knew Milly Mann?"

She nodded without looking up. Her lips quivered. She caught up a fold of the dark dress she was wearing and sat twisting it in the fingers of one hand.

So that was it. Ruth Cahill was jealous—and jealousy is the nurse of suspicion and carking care, those twins of trouble and doubt and general cussedness that cause so many pangs in our human lives. I gave her a sort of breathing space after that, and presently out of it she asked a question:

"Just what did that girl say before she was arrested?"

I told her the whole story.

"The balloon was red," she said as I paused. "We all saw it. What would be

her reason for alleging it was green? She must know the evidence of six pairs of eyes would outweigh the verdict of one."

"It is a bit peculiar," I returned.

"And she says she's been taking treatment for her nerves. What sort of treatment?"

I smiled again as I answered. "That is something we didn't learn."

Most surprisingly she inquired: "Is there any treatment which would be likely to pervert the action of the optic nerves?"

"Why, really, Miss Cahill, I don't know," I told her, more than a little startled by the suggestion. It was in a way very closely allied to Bryce's remark on the way to the Cahill house, which Johnson had profanely brushed aside. "But, Miss Mann is the likeliest suspect we have as yet in this matter."

She looked me full in the eyes and her own were steady. "I know that, Mr. Glace, but I try—Daddy Drew taught me to try and be fair always in all things." And all at once, without any preliminary warning, she put down her face in the crook of her arm on the back of her chair and began to sob.

That touch of the feminine in one who had held herself so long in restraint throughout a day of dreadful stress, affected me strangely. I glanced at Bryce and found him intently studying a picture on the far wall of the room. And I think too, that the shaking sobs tearing at the body of the girl before me helped me to make up my mind.

"Miss Cahill," I spoke into the paroxysm of her weeping, "would you mind telling me your age?"

She jerked back to an erect position, and Bryce pulled down his eyes. He knew my intent by the question I had asked, but the girl could not, and it seemed that her sobs were broken off, in a strange gasp of surprise.

"My—age, Mr. Glace?"

"Yes, Miss Cahill."

"Why—I was twenty-four in December—the eighth."

"And—what is the birthday of Mr. Byrne?"

"He was born on the twenty-eighth of May. He told you himself he was twenty-seven."

"Exactly—and yesterday was Friday, the fourth of April, and your father was fifty-nine?"

"Yes—but—" Her expression was acutely puzzled. "Mr. Glace—I don't understand."

"Not now," I said, because it was no time to indulge in any dissertation on Semi Dual and his methods of using birth dates to determine through astrological calculations, the unknown, the undreamed trend of fate in the future or the buried histories of past lives. "And if you'll pardon me, Miss Cahill, it would take too long to explain. But I give you my word that I intend to use the information in the investigation you have seen fit to put into our hands. We're going now, and if I might suggest, try and get a little rest, with the assurance in mind that our endeavors toward learning the truth will be conducted along wholly other than police lines."

"And you will let me know what you—learn?"

"Yes, Miss Cahill."

"Then good night. I—shall take your advice and—lie down."

A rap came on the door and it opened. Stephen George appeared. "Pardon me, Miss Ruth," he began, "but Mr. Byrne telephoned from headquarters and asked me to see that a bag was packed with some of his things and sent down. I went up to his suite to comply and I found this in his belongings." He lifted and held out a gas mask and canister, dangling grotesquely in his hands.

In a flash I saw it—what it might mean—and I know Jim did, and so, too, I think did Ruth Cahill, for her face was once more a thing of wide-eyed horror. But all she said was: "Very well, Stephen, the gentlemen are leaving."

We went out, past George with the odd goggle-eyed contrivance he had found. And it came to me that Ruth Cahill was just waiting, just holding herself tensely vibrant under the lash of emotion until we should have left the room.

Then we were outside in the street, where night had fallen and Jim's hand was on my

arm. "Did you get it, m' son?" he questioned as I turned toward a corner to catch a car that would take us down into the city.

"Of course I got it," I told him.

"Wearin' one of those things a man could have filled a room with that darned gas. An' that would knock out all this stuff about balloons."

"Of course," I agreed. The thing was patent. "Or a man just out of the gas and flame service might very well have brought home one of the things."

Jim grunted: "Well, I kin see that, too. It's like a thing appearin' green to one person and red to half a dozen others at one an' th' same time. I reckon you're going to Dual, from th' line of questions you was pullin' there at th' end."

"Yes," I said, "we're going to Semi. And it wouldn't surprise me if when Johnson suggested calling us in he had something like that in mind."

CHAPTER VIII.

"SANTONIN."

JOHNSON knew our extraordinary friend, Semi Dual; had seem him clear up more than one tangled case by his singular methods, at which he had formerly scoffed.

For that he could hardly be blamed. In this material age it is asking a good dead to expect a hard-headed member of the city detective force or any other modern individual, to give credence to the means Dual employed in his work.

Literally, our friend was a metaphysician —a student of the higher natural and mental forces, an exponent of the law of cause and effect; one who held that thoughts are an actual form of force and as such no less than any other manifestation of universal force are—things. Telepathy—the ability to read thought waves—was a thing he had demonstrated to my conviction more than once. Astrology, the science of the effect of interplanetary magnetic vibration on the course of earth phenomena, the destinies of earth-born lives, was a thing in which he firmly believed. The law of retributive justice—the doctrine that such justice was no more than the working out of effects brought about by the operation of certain causes, was a tenet he did not hesitate to preach. To him all force was one—and no matter whether manifested as light, heat, action, thought or speech, it was drawn from the universal fountain head of all Creative power, differing in quality not at all, but only in manifestation as it was refracted through the different media of material expression, operating on a higher or lower plane.

It was to the study of such things and their application to the lives of mankind he devoted his time. And for the better gaining of the seclusion necessary to such studies, without cutting himself off from the ocean of every-day life about him, he had fitted up his quarters on the Urania Building roof. Its tower furnished him an abode. He had converted the roof itself into a beautiful garden, open to the skies he loved in spring and fall and summer, protected against the blasts of winter by a metal framework, supporting curving panes of greenish-yellow glass.

And there by his methods I had seen him unravel many a baffling problem no other man could answer; yes, and drive his findings home. For despite all his knowledge of the things commonly called "occult" by the average individual, Semi Dual was above all else, a practical man. "Material proof for material man," was his motto, and having learned what he sought by his own peculiar methods, he never failed to support his findings by means of "material" proof.

To such a man, then, it was my intention to carry the mystery surrounding Cahill's death.

We caught a car. We ran back to the heart of the city, where the Urania Building towered up against the star-studded, early spring skies. We entered its massive doors and caught a cage to the twentieth floor and mounted a bronze and marble stairway that led up to Semi's domain on the roof.

Soft chimes, actuated by a plate set into the path that led from the stairhead to the tower, between beds of shrubs and flowers,

announced our coming. Even before we reached it the door of the tower opened before us an oblong of light.

Semi's one companion in his voluntary seclusion, Henri, as he was called, appeared to greet us and wave us across an anteroom done in browns, to a farther door.

We tapped upon that door and a deep voice, bell-like almost in its modulation, bade us enter. Acting on its permission, we stepped inside a farther room.

A man sat there. He was large, generously framed, with a splendid head, a well-trimmed imperial beard, a high-bridged, slightly aquiline nose and clear, yet seemingly unfathomable, slate-gray eyes. He occupied a great chair, beside a great desk, across which a glow was thrown from an apple of golden glass held in the hand of a life-sized figure of Venus, done in bronze. He was clad in a loose robe of pure white, bordered at throat and wrists and hem in purple, and as we came through the door, he lifted his face and smiled.

"Welcome, my friends," he said. "Is it not written, 'Knock and it shall be opened unto you; seek, and ye shall find'? Judge Andrew Cahill was murdered. Has the fact been learned?"

"Oh, yes, it's been learned—though they nearly muffed it. That's why we're here," Bryce replied to that somewhat surprising statement. "But—"

"You know my penchant for erecting horary figures of important happenings," Dual said, as he waved us to chairs. "When the death was announced, I set a figure for the occurrence. I would judge the elements involved peculiar—that some very subtle agent was used to encompass his death."

"Judge Cahill was poisoned by phosgene gas," I told him, as I seated myself in a chair by the end of the desk; one I nearly always used on my visits to him.

"And—"

I told him the whole thing from beginning to end. So far as I know, I omitted no least detail from the most casual word of conversation I could recall to Johnson's double arrest. Dual had taught me how to put him in touch with such a matter long ere this. And while I spoke, he lay back in his great chair, folded his hands and closed his deep gray eyes. Always he did that when I brought him some human tangle for the solving. It was his way of gaining absolute concentration on every word I uttered—of shutting out all else and storing away each fact and incident of my narrative in his mind.

"You have done well to bring this to me," he said, as I made an end, "for once more the evil which is ever with us has seen fit to break the law of the tablets of Moses—thou shalt not kill—that law meant to be man's protecion—the infraction of which must be paid for, as any debt against the laws of the Creative intent must be paid."

Bryce nodded. "That's why we brought it to you on th' jump. We figured it was your sort of case."

Semi Dual shook his head at my partner's reply, but he smiled. "One may presume," he said, "that you refer indirectly to the fact that I have never cared to handle matters involving mere thievery or some such roguery—happenings involving purely material loss. But as I have told you ere this, my reason for such a stand is that the pursuit of wealth, of material gain, is vain—that material things, the baubles of the world, are dross. Does one take them with him, beyond the veil?

"He leaves them behind, even as he leaves the body when the spirit passes. For the spirit of man alone, goes on along the path of advancement when its time in the body is done. Hence, since the spirit alone persists beyond the veil of the future, is alone of life enduring, is it not plainly the one thing important in the cosmic scheme of advancement? And why, then, trouble the spirit with the consideration of the evanescent, the inevitably decaying material things of life? The aim of all life is the advancement of the spirit. In the end it leaves behind all save itself."

It was a characteristic speech, a voicing of the keynote of Semi-Dual's existence and the philosophy in which he believed. As he broke off he put out a hand and drew to him a sheet of paper from a pile of blank pages before him on the desk.

"Give me the three birth dates you obtained this evening, Gordon," he required.

I complied and he wrote the data down. I watched, knowing this was the beginning. That with this information he would commence his investigation by erecting the horoscopic charts of Andrew Cahill and Ruth his daughter, and William Byrne, his ward; that so he would gain an insight into those influences which had brought them into their present position, those influences which had been at work to bring them into their present positions since they were born, and polarized the magnetic indices of their future existence with their first natal breath. I knew it because I had seen him do this same thing so many, many times before this.

Then, as he shoved the paper aside, Bryce asked a question. "See here; is there any trouble with the nerves or any treatment could make a person think a thing was different color from what it really was?"

Semi Dual gave him a glance. "There are visual hallucinations—many of them," he made answer. "And there are drugs which produce certain optical effects. Santonin given to saturation causes a person to see the majority of objects looked at as either yellowish or green. Your question, Mr. Bryce, opens a rather interesting field of speculation. There is a close relation between those forms of vibration known as light and color and sound. You say Miss Mann has been taking treatment for some affection of the nerves?"

"She said so, and so did Byrne," said Jim. "And—I've been thinking—there might be some sort of kink outside of plain lyin' would explain that girl's callin' a red balloon green. There ain't no sense in a lie that's goin' to be spotted right at th' start, an' a doll in th' business she's in, ought to be wise enough to know it."

Semi Dual swung about so as to face him while he was speaking, and for several moments after he had finished he appeared to weigh his words before he responded with a question:

"This young woman is of a nervous temperament, in your estimation?" he asked thoughtfully.

"She looks like a bunch of fluff," Bryce declared.

"And the field of psychoneurasthenia is one of the least explored as yet in human comprehension. When you see Inspector Johnson in the morning it would do no harm to learn the nature of the treatments she has been taking, as well as Miss Mann's age," said Semi Dual. His gray eyes lighted with a momentary flash, his expression altered in some subtle manner—became what were best described perhaps as tensely keen.

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.

MOVING PICTURES

BY WALTER E. SHANNON

"YOUR picture in my heart I wear,
I love your eyes and curls."
Then off he bowled,
The same thing told
To twenty other girls.

She found him out and sent a note,
And told him they must part:
"It seems to me
That yours must be
A moving-picture heart."

The Dagger of Macbeth

by Stephen Chalmers

CHAPTER I.

THE DARK ISLAND.

THAT island is as dark as ever it was, despite that American influence has changed semibarbarity in its Caribbean neighbors to almost ultracivilization. The Dark Island, I shall call it, which term includes two republics, for where one portion of the island is black and speaks French and revolutes as regularly as an alarm-clock, the other portion, its black slightly modified by Andalusian blood, speaks Spanish and revolutes at lengthier intermission—like, say, an eight-day clock.

Both sections have one thing in common. In Caribbee French or aboriginal Coromantee or negroid Spanish, that thing is called by different names; but they all mean the same thing, which will presently appear—forbidding, ugly, brutal, weird, damnable, but interesting.

What Ronald McBeth did there was a mystery to me. I had known him at college—Edinburgh—before either of us heard of Horace Greeley's advice to enterprising youth. Years later he noticed my name attached to an article in the Geographic Survey on the head-hunters of the Eastern Archipelago. He wrote a tentative note from somewhere south of Panama and I came back at him with a hail-old-fellow-well-met which assured him I was indeed myself and no other.

We corresponded at intervals thereafter, sometimes years elapsing between letter and reply; for McBeth was as unsettled as myself. One time I would hear that he had just emerged from an Antarctic expedition and, a few years later, that he had survived—by luck—a journey into the region of the Amazon headwaters. I remember how he quoted at the end of that letter, which was all stained with sweat:

> "With one man of the crew alive,
> What put to sea with seventy-five."

On my side, I was usually absent on some ethnographic survey—white Eskimo or a lost tribe of Aztecs—that sort of thing; so that often a letter from McBeth would lie on my desk for a year before I found it, and then Heaven only knew where McBeth might be reached, save through the Adventurers', to which club he occasionally had recourse, *via* cable and a much-harassed consul.

But at last he seemed to settle down like a sane person. I did not hear of it until after my return from studying the Singing Apes. He was managing a gold-mining concession in the dark island of which I have spoken, somewhere in that Spanish-Afric section of it. He hoped I would visit him. He had nothing to offer, he said, save every possible inducement to stay away! There was nothing interesting about the mine, he stated, because they hadn't started to mine and didn't know when they would—or could! The country, he gently hinted, was " rotten " with fever and such towns as it boasted, alive with cholera, due to the pleasant native habit of using any sort of water for every sort of purpose and not having any appreciation of its qualities as a cleansing medium.

All of which fascinated. If there is one thing that appeals to me it is a hopelessly unregenerate people. I draw the line at degenerate, although a lady relative of mine cannot see any distinction. But just think of the opportunities to the ethnographist or the anthropophagist, or whatever you please to call the man in my business! What, for instance, are the ideas of such a people on morality? Is there anything they hold sacred, even if it is a white snake or a blue crocodile? If they have a religion of any sort they are not, at least, unregenerate. Professor Provan disputes this. Provan holds that religion as a form of actual degeneracy does occur, and—

However, even if one rides a hobby, that hobby should be stabled on occasion.

As I say, McBeth invited me to—stay away. Wherefore I went, making the visit to my college friend an excuse—or *vice versa*—for an expedition into the darkest depths of that dark island. Of my observations I shall say nothing here; my expanded notes will presently appear in the *Journal of Ethnographic Survey*. Suffice it that darkest Africa had never anything on Dark Island. The former was to be expected; a small section of it, four and a half days from Sandy Hook was not.

The country was rich in minerals, hardwoods, everything worth while to the powers that colonize; but nothing was being done, nothing could be done, short of first submerging the island—and its population—for half an hour beneath the blue, cleansing waters of the surrounding Caribbean.

But the people did have something they worshiped, and it may be that Professor Provan is right.

In due time I met McBeth in this migrated chunk of darkest Africa. He greeted me and my native company at the door of a low-roofed bungalow, which was surrounded—at a respectable and only fairly smellable distance—by numerous thatch-and-wattle native huts. He was tall, large-boned, rather hook-nosed, sandy-mustached, gray-eyed—very gray-eyed—and I never saw such powerful thighs on a man. One noticed these long, narrow, curving thighs by the listless way a loose revolver-belt caressed them when he moved. His clothes—such as they were—were not of recent date.

"Dr. Livingstone, I presume!" I hailed.

"Son of a gun!" said McBeth in his familiar, curiously clipped way of speech. But when he smiled I knew he was changed only on the outside.

Well, that is all about how McBeth and I came together again in the heart of Dark Island.

I stayed with him for a fortnight, meaning to stay longer; but—well, we had to come away at the end of that period. In the interval I rested up and spent hours assuring myself that I understood my own notes. There was nothing—absolutely nothing of interest—to see around this other-side-of-beyond where McBeth was living and having his business.

There were several forbidding peaks around the little hill about which McBeth's "settlement" clustered. Down the main valley roared a torrent at all seasons, fed by innumerable freshets from the descending ravines, or gashes, where there was always a shower visibly in progress. The place was not without a certain natural beauty, but the lords of mankind had no idea how to utilize those gifts.

These hills were full of gold; McBeth showed me proof inside of an hour; but not only were the natives too shiftless to work it for themselves, but too lazy to work it even for white man's wages. To bring in an army of brawny white men was something that simply could not be done, short of turning over the entire gold output to whatever swarthy gentleman with a stovepipe hat, an admiral's epaulets and spurs strapped to big, bare, black feet, happened to be *presidente* for the—er—moment.

So McBeth's days were spent waiting for something to develop either in the way of a concession reasonably clamped or American capital—or confidence—while he ate his heart out watching that wonderful torrent wasting its power in riotous tumbling.

You will judge that McBeth was a most unromantic person. I mean by that that he refused to see anything romantic or picturesque in anything. Perhaps one would be more accurate in saying that, so keen was his sense of these things that he was

ashamed of, and tried to hide, the "weakness." He knew more poetry than I ever read, and in the evenings he would sometimes illuminate a silence with some sublime quotation which he would break off at its most sublime point with: "And all that sort of stuff." I realized that the man was a mine of information regarding the things I wanted to know about those unregenerate, or degenerate—what you please—people; but either I was a poor miner or he was as impossible of mining as that gold which held him there.

His head man was called Tamayo, which is really a Spanish name. A more evil-looking person I never clapped eyes on. It is no play upon words to say that he looked like the devil. By that I mean he was handsome in a sinister way; half negro, half Spanish; with a hooked beak, keen, snaky, black eyes set close together, and long black hair with just a suggestion of a crimp in it. His whole body in movement suggested stealth, steely strength and serpentine suppleness. I had a secret desire to see him leap at something—just as one is fascinated by the serpent ready to strike, the tiger ready to spring—just to see the lightning speed of it.

That man was a demon. I was not mistaken. The first time I saw him—or, rather, he saw me—he looked me over with a slithering eye from head to foot and then his nostrils twitched in a way that was somehow insulting. Later, I mentioned my antipathy to McBeth.

"Rotten bad—all through," said he.

"Then why do you keep him on?"

"Useful," said McBeth. "Got brain. Man I had before—Porto Rican—unpopular. Tamayo got him."

"How?"

"Knife—ear to ear. Caught asleep."

"Lovely!" I said, chilled as much by McBeth's crisp, casual manner as by the episode.

He was cutting out his pipe as he spoke, employing the point of a curious-looking knife. I had previously noticed the handle of it protruding from his belt-sheath and been attracted first by the ancient appearance of some carving on what appeared to be a sawed-off buckhorn and then by the fact that from a tarnished silver claw setting at the top of the haft some ornament was missing.

"That's an odd knife you have, McBeth," I ventured, to change the conversation to a less discomforting channel—I decided to conceal my dislike of Tamayo.

"Old thing," said my friend. "From Scotland."

He had laid the knife on the table and I reached for it.

"Why—it's a Highland dirk!" I exclaimed.

"'Course. Lots like it."

CHAPTER II.

"THE DAGGER OF MACBETH."

BUT it was a very old dirk. I recognized that at once. Two-edged was its blade and the tempered metal was of no modern make. Evidently it had been forged and beaten into shape with a hammer. The hilt was curiously chased and the horn, a section of stag-antler, was carven into figures of a wild boar on one side and an ancient crest on the other. I recognized the crest of Macbeth, but did not utter the question which half-jocularly suggested itself. I knew Ronald McBeth was of that blood which spilled and was spilled with lamentable frequency in the ancient days of Scotland. But if there was one thing that roused McBeth it was any reference to the fact. I have heard him growl in his throat when some correspondent—intending a compliment no doubt—spelled his name "Macbeth" instead of "McBeth."

"How did you come to lose the stone? Usual cairngorm, I suppose?"

"Cairngorm—yes," said he, filling his cut-out pipe. "Some black magpie. Pried it out in the night."

"But what for? A cairngorm stone is worth only a shilling or two."

He stopped in the act of lighting his pipe and looked over the match-flame at me in a curious way. But he said nothing and went on puffing his pipe into a glow. I supposed he thought I had asked a foolish question; as indeed I had. The beautiful yellow stone called the cairngorm, so lavish-

ly studded in the brooches, claymores and dirks of Scottish highland costume, is nevertheless worth next to nothing as a gem. But it was new to these people of the dark island jungles. McBeth had probably said enough in two words. A " black magpie " had been decoyed into petty larceny by its glitter.

That was all about the dirk—then. I stayed on, working at my notes, without which I must have been bored. I saw little of McBeth in the daytime. But for those occasional loquacious—for him—spells in the evenings and my knowledge of the true gold of the man, I might have been ready to write him down a sullen boor. He spent the greater part of his days prospecting for more gold against that hoped-for day when he might be able to convert it into bullion.

My own people—I mean the twenty or more coast natives whom I had coaxed into service less by money than curiosity and the privilege of carrying real guns and ammunition—my own people did not quarter with McBeth's natives, but set up camp—with my host's approval—on the other side of the torrent. Neither did they mix with McBeth's people, openly despising them, in fact.

And why should they not? Those blacks of mine had lived in civilized towns where there was a sewerage system, even if it did run down the middle surface of main street. Nearly all of them had had a hand in setting up and knocking down *presidentes;* two of them had been *generales* in revolutionary " armies," and my head man had a four-in-hand necktie! They were a superior class altogether and now that they carried such guns as I had furnished for my own protection, McBeth's people became as mere worms under their august strut, mere transparencies before their distant gaze.

My wants—meals and so forth—were supplied in McBeth's absence by a very handsome half-caste girl who went by the curious name of Rama. From the first I had observed her as I had the head man, Tamayo. She was very light in color; but perhaps that was due to illness, for it was only a day or two before I discovered that she was a young mother. I saw her one day between meals nursing a baby that could not have been more than three weeks old.

The child was much fairer even than she. I wondered about the father. Next to McBeth, Tamayo was the only light-colored person in the settlement. I fancied Tamayo might be Rama's husband, for in his presence she evinced the fear and deference one would expect in the wife of such a silent, sneering devil-person. But McBeth undeceived me.

" Child's near white," said he. " Father was Salmo Pilar—Spanish—my assistant. Usual native arrangement. Widow now."

" What happened to the paternal Pilar?" I asked with foreboding.

" Died suddenly—ground glass."

Again I felt a chill. I had some notes on ground glass and bamboo fur as native measures in cases of personal antipathy.

" Tamayo?" I ventured.

" Possibly," said McBeth, flashing me a quick glance. " But why Tamayo?"

" The woman. I thought, perhaps, he was the husband, but—she's scared to death of your amiable head man."

" Got 'em all scared," said McBeth. " Bad lot. Trouble-maker. Got more power than I. Why I keep him. Useful in my business. Must have labor when time comes."

I set down these incidents just as they occurred. They seemed to have no connection then, but they linked up swiftly enough, presently.

A morning or two later, after breakfast, I heard McBeth muttering savagely while he moved restlessly about our low-roofed living-room, clapping a hand to his hip one moment, then rummaging among the papers on his desk. In his left hand he held a twisted rope of native tobacco.

" Knife," he grunted. " Must ha' laid it on this table. Odd."

I had noticed that it was not in the sheath at his belt; which was odd, for McBeth was a creature of methodical habit. Probably he had left it on the table after cutting a pouchful of tobacco on the previous night. He did not remember doing so; which he thought very curious, although I did not. That's the trouble about mislaying things; you don't remember doing it.

"Anybody in here this morning?" he asked suddenly.

"Only Rama," I said, burying myself in my notes.

He went on grumbling and rummaging about the room. Plainly he was greatly perturbed by the loss of that old highland dirk. All at once he uttered a surprised "Huh!" I looked up. He was standing in the middle of the room, soundlessly whistling through pursed lips.

"Magpie again," said he. "Remember now. In my belt when I turned in. Gone now. Answer?—in the night."

I somehow had a vision of Tamayo, the gentleman who had slit the Porto Rican's throat from ear to ear and the same, probably, who had put ground glass in Salmo Pilar's coffee-sugar—Tamayo, the saturnine, softly entering while McBeth and I slept and deftly removing that dirk from its sheath. There was cause for thankfulness that the thief, having a knife so handy, had not tried its qualities on the exposed throats of a couple of white men wrapped in slumber sweet.

That day McBeth did not go into the bush, but stayed around the settlement, coming and going restlessly. I never saw a man so silently ruffled over just a petty theft.

"Did the value it so much?" I asked.

"Sentiment—that sort of thing," he growled. "Very old dirk. Tradition. Don't know how much Shakespeare had to do with it."

Then I understood. It did not seem possible that that could be the same dagger, and McBeth himself seemed inclined to make light of the tradition. But if it was—I did not blame him for regretting its loss.

Around that dagger memory and imagination recreated a famous scene. I saw Macbeth himself, at dead of night, cold sweat oozing from his every pore, ambition fighting against—what was it?—cowardly fear or manly conscience? In the guest-chamber Duncan, the king, sleeping in fancied security beneath the roof-tree of his host. And then the woman, more ambitious than the man, her face hard in the candle-light that glistened on the cairngorm of the dirk in her lord's hand, and her voice harder still as she whispered: "Infirm of purpose. Give *me* the dagger!"

And here was the descendant of the Macbeth, in the jungles of a far, dark island, growling less—as it seemed to me—that he had lost that infamous weapon than that he had to borrow my *cuchillo* to cut his tobacco twist!

Well, the knife did not turn up that day, or the next, or the next. McBeth seemed to forget the matter except for a few minutes after breakfast each day, when he growled as he cut his twist with my knife. No doubt the dirk had gone the way of its cairngorm ornament, the latter awaking a cupidity to possess the setting. Some half-savage black had it, doubtless, and gloated over his treasure, dazzled by the great yellow eye of the cairngorm, his savage instincts roused by the sense of man-superiority this two-edged blade brought to him.

In the mean time, the woman, Rama, was acting queerly. Her fairness was now a sickly pallor. Her eyes were haunted, her whole atmosphere hunted. The way she served our meals would have brought discredit to an incompetent, underpaid waitress in a third-rate quick-lunch. It was when she dropped a pot of cabbage-palm soup from her nerveless hands that McBeth challenged her—not at all unkindly, be it said.

"Look here, girl!" he said in negroid Spanish. "What ails you? Baby sick—or what?"

He used the word *pequeña* for baby. I thought the woman would fall. In more or less choked articulation she said something like:

"*Niña—pobre niña—muerto!*"

"*Lo siento!*" said McBeth with genuine sympathy. "When did the baby die, Rama? What was wrong?"

She stared in a helpless sort of way at McBeth. Then her eyes flashed with the fire of mother-love, mother-hate. It seemed to me she was about to say something that would throw light upon the baby's death, a light that would not cast the shadow of blame upon herself; but she suddenly checked herself. Her jaw literally dropped and that same hunted look came into her

eyes, which were all at once fixed upon the doorway.

Involuntarily I turned. There stood Tamayo in the oblong of sunlight. He looked more devilish than ever. While he addressed McBeth in suave tones his eyes rested upon Rama. She, poor girl, was indeed a spectacle to arrest any one's gaze in that moment.

CHAPTER III.

THE CALL OF THE MUMBO-JUMBO.

"*BUENA dia, señor,*" said Tamayo in his corrupt Spanish. "What is the *señor's* pleasure for the afternoon?"

McBeth gave his instructions and later himself joined Tamayo in some excursion into the bush. I was left alone with my notes and was still busily engaged with them an hour later, when I heard a scraping at the door. There appeared around the edge of the sunlit oblong a round black head slit across by a grinning mouth. It was a Jamaican negro—a stray from his own island. He was more of a fool than a knave, servilely anxious to please, and from the first he had seemed determined to attach himself to my service.

"*Buccra,*" he whispered, grinning and squirming, "yoh wan' see sumtin' funny dis night? Yessah? Yessah! Me tek yoh de-deh—there—after night time come. No, sah, me no 'fraid! Me see plenty-plenty foolishness same like in Jamaica. Yoh jis' put silvah-piece under yo' tongue an' nuttin' can hu't yoh."

"What the devil are you talking about?" I asked, alert nevertheless. Was it possible—

"Yessah! Dem is gwine hab obi dance dis night in de bush. Yoh jis' gib me silvah-piece foh put under me tongue an' me show yoh sumtin'."

Obi! The word suggested "snake" to me. A snake-dance in the jungle of the dark island? Splendid! But I did not let my grinning friend know how well pleased I was. I wondered what size silver-piece that capacious mouth would take as a charm against the malevolent influence of the snake-god.

I told him I would think about it and might send for him later. I wished to consult McBeth. Besides, I was still much in the dark as to the nature of the promised event.

McBeth returned about sundown. He was scowling ferociously. When I told him of my grinning visitor and his offer to reveal jungle mystery his face momentarily cleared.

"That's it!" said he. "Knew something was in the wind. Orgy to-night. That's it. Where's Rama?"

Rama, it turned out, had not prepared supper.

Rama had disappeared.

"Humph!" grunted McBeth thoughtfully. "Canned meat. Blythwood. Best I can offer. When 'd she say that baby died?"

"She didn't say. Tamayo turned up and—"

"Probably nine nights ago. Ninth night to-night—sort of wake. No sleep for us. Row all night. Batter drums. Howl. Keep ghosts away."

"My would-be cicerone mentioned something about *obi,*" I ventured.

"Oh — mumbo-jumbo?" said McBeth, momentarily interested. "Thought it was baby 'nine-night.' Similar stuff. Different names — *ñañigo* — *obi* — *hoodoo* — *brujeria*—that sort of thing. Jamaican, was he? He'd say *obi—obeah,* perhaps. Originally African—snake-worship or similar rot. Always evil. Bush gods always evil. Negative sort of worship, you know. Don't pray for good; pray to avert evil. Interesting in its way."

"I'd like to see it," I suggested. "It's rather in my line, you know."

"Nothing to see," McBeth grunted. "Story-book stuff all that—story-book stuff. Bunch of dirty blacks—and Tamayo's the worst of 'em—howling around a fire, dancing corruptions of coast ragtime. Dressed up like savages. Try to think they are and usually succeed when they've had enough rum. Wind up by killing a kid goat or a white cock. Drink the blood hot—eat meat raw. Rotten!"

"Still—"

"Of course, if you want to," said my

host quickly. "We'll trace the affair by the drums."

As he had finally fallen in with my wish I was somewhat surprised when, after nightfall and canned meat, my grinning man Friday turning up and making mysteriously signals to me from the doorway, McBeth roared at him:

"Get out, you black swine!"

He who was more of a fool than a knave, but not such a fool at that, vanished, merging suddenly with darkness. The mighty anger of McBeth was his greatest safeguard in that isolated place.

My host said nothing when just before we started I strapped on my automatic pistol. His own revolver-belt dangled loosely about his powerful thighs—but then it was always there. He smiled a little, but no doubt he felt that if it did me good to imagine a spice of peril in the adventure, I was entitled to all the thrill I could get out of it.

For some little time we could hear the throb of drums faintly in the distance. I was sure it come from the east, across the river and probably from some valley beyond the peaks. I was a little surprised, therefore, when, emerging from the bungalow, McBeth started in the very opposite direction. I said nothing then, following in silence.

We went out by the opposite side of McBeth's settlement which, I observed, was all in darkness. We did not encounter a human being. Temporary desertion of the place was attested by the lugubrious howling of a number of mongrel dogs.

"The call of mumbo-jumbo!" said McBeth, jerking his head toward the dark, silent huts.

The moment we reached the edge of the jungle to the west, McBeth swung in his course until I saw by the dipper that we were heading due north. This course brought us to the torrent of which I have spoken, but some distance above the settlement. McBeth knew the ground like a child's primer and led me unerringly to where a suspension bridge of woven lianas and bamboo poles spanned the gorge. At the bottom of this I could see the white turmoil of the mountain stream.

On the other side we continued north, then northeast, and finally almost made a circle of our course, traveling eastward through the jungle and guided over an invisible trail only by a narrow belt of starred sky above us. Once McBeth laid a hand on my arm and pointed downward to the right. There, upon the small hillock around which the mine settlement lay in the amphitheater of hills, a single light burned in McBeth's bungalow. Dark blots to the right of it suggested the deserted village. Between us and the village the torrent showed in an irregular streaky-white line, and on this side of the stream were numerous little lights in the camp of my own people.

The latter seemed to have neglected, or not received, what McBeth called "the call of mumbo-jumbo." We could hear their broad laughter over some game they were playing—gambling, of course—gambling their very shirts, such as had them—my own distributed ammunition perhaps. Mingling with their shouts and laughter the throb of drums came distinctly from the east.

We had thus worked around so that no longer did the peaks stand directly between us and the sound. I marveled at McBeth's caution, considering the contempt in which, patently, he held the whole excursion and its objective.

"Self-respect," he said. "Wouldn't have these people imagine me curious about their doings. Why I sent Jamaican away. Also went in other direction."

But as we came nearer that throbbing of drums, I fancied his own curiosity began to get the upper hand. We crossed the shoulder of a ridge and descended into a densely jungled ravine, out of which arose a rhythmic medley of sound. There were human voices chanting, hoarsely but subdued. I wish I could set down the tune of that chant, if tune it could be called. It was like no tune I ever heard; yet in dreams—boy dreams—I seem to have heard something like it in the back of my brain when reading of some barbaric orgy where brutal death brooded over the scene. It was not so much unmusical singing as a musical muttering to the soft clapping of hands, the

shuffle of bare feet on beaten earth and, through it all, the insistent drum-throbbing that came to the ears with the sensation of blood beating in one's temples.

Presently through the tangle of the jungle appeared a red mist, growing into a dancing flare. McBeth halted me with a touch. In the flickering light, by which we could see, but were ourselves unseen, he looked up and around him. He presently pointed to a giant *ceiba*-tree, the trunk of which stood near to us, but one of whose grotesque arms reached out almost over the clearing where the fire was. By signs McBeth made me to understand that we must climb the tree and creep out on that limb as far as we dared without being seen from below.

Not without some difficulty we gained the first fork of the giant tree. Thereafter it was easy enough to work ourselves out upon the limb, which alone was as thick as the trunk of a good-sized tree. We had to move very cautiously, half straddling, half crawling, keeping our legs up and our shoulders close to the upper surface of the limb. We finally halted our progress when we were directly above the inner edge of the circle below. Even there we could feel the heat of the fire which blazed in the center, but it was not unbearable and its light served to reveal the surrounding scene in detail.

There was enough of interesting detail to occupy us for a few minutes to the exclusion of the scene as a whole and its meaning.

The two main objects that caught the eye at once were the fire—naturally—and the hideous thing that McBeth whispered was "old mumbo-jumbo himself"—that is to say, the supposed god *obi*, or *ñañigo*, or *voodoo*, or *brujo*—whatever he happened to be called by these particular worshipers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE THIRD EYE.

IT was not, after all, a snake or anything like one. The idol was about eight feet high and set up against the face of a cliff which backed the cleared, beaten-earth arena where the fire blazed. It was apparently constructed of some kind of dark clay, modeled in the rough and painted after it had been hardened by fire. It was no fine example of the plastic art, even among a savage people. The thing had no limbs, only a shapeless body hunched at the shoulders and a short, thick neck, upon which sat an abnormal head thatched with long grass for hair and a crown of upright spears of palm-fronds. The nose was a flat, broad blob of clay, the nostrils redly painted to appear wide apart and distended. The mouth was like most savage attempts at such delineation—a quartered-orange effect, fillen in with saw-tooth lines. The lips, thick and pendulous, were painted a bright vermilion, and the chin seemed to drip the same sanguinary hue from the bestial mouth.

The god had three eyes; two in the usual place for eyes, but set grotesquely wide apart; the third, larger and gleaming brightly in the very middle of the forehead.

"My cairngorm!" muttered McBeth. And then I saw that the third "eye" was indeed that great, yellow stone.

There was nothing to be done about it just then. McBeth had the satisfaction of knowing where the cairngorm was and now had a fairly good idea of the identity of the thief, for unless my eyes deceived me the high priest of this strange religious orgy was the head man, Tamayo. He sat—but wait a moment!

Around the fire moved about a hundred negroes—negroes more or less—negroid people. Mostly men; but there were women, too. All were dressed in the most fantastic manner, a favorite costume being female in the men and male in the women.

Without exception their dark faces were plastered with some chalky smear overlaid with streaks of brilliant paints. Each and all seemed imbued with the spirit of extreme masquerade such as characterizes Guy Fawkes parades in England, Hallowe'en in Scotland and, in the neighboring island of Jamaica, the "John Canoe" masques of Emancipation Day. The so-called John Canoe masque of Jamaica

is, I think, a survival or a mild outgrowth of Obi worship.

These almost ludicrous figures moved around the fire in a curious shuffling dance, each individual seeming oblivious to the rest, each appearing half dazed, as if in a trance. And ever they muttered rather than sang that horrible chant which I would give a great deal to be able to set down. It still haunts me, and if it once resounds in my memory I know I am in for it all day or all night. You know that maddening persistence of a silly phrase in doggerel music?

Diagonally across from Mumbo-Jumbo were the "musicians"—four performers on goat-skin drums and a strange, bedaubed contortionist who scraped nothing more or less than an old file against a *cassava* grater. He kept perfect time with these rasping instruments which he scraped together, now above his head, now behind his back, now under one high-lifted leg, now under the other. Occasionally his enthusiasm took him amid the dancers and while he pranced with them he would add his voice in some wild stanza to the accompaniment of the drums and the file-and-grater.

As the dancers circled the fire they had to pass the hideous clay god and the figure of the high priest, who sat at the base of the idol, his head almost hidden in a brightly colored blanket, only his eyes—which were unmistakably the eyes of Tamayo—peering at the fire. In the center of the latter an immense pot swung from a tripod of green hardwood sticks. Tamayo seemed oblivious to the dancers, but each and all, passing in their weird gyrations, spread out their hands, with the palms upward, in deference either to *Obi,* or his high priest, or both.

"Big session!" grunted McBeth. "Glad I came."

Thereafter my own interest heightened and I settled down on that broad limb to enjoy the whole performance.

Presently Tamayo stirred and rose to his feet. The "music" did not cease; the dancers did not pause; rather the former grew louder and the latter increased their efforts. Tamayo touched a passing dancer, a woman in dungaree pantaloons and with her face hideously painted. At a word from the high priest she ran to the side of the clearing where, next to the orchestra, several baskets were lying, covered with clothes. From one of these she extracted a white live cock with its feet tied together.

This she brought to Tamayo, who took the snowy rooster and held it up to the god, *obi.* The firelight gleamed sinisterly on McBeth's cairngorm. The doomed rooster flapped and squawked frantically in Tamayo's grip. That worthy drew from under his enveloping blanket a machete and with one sweep decapitated the cock.

The first stream of red blood from the severed trunk he swished in the face of the bestial-appearing idol. Then he swiftly lifted the still flapping, though headless. fowl over his own upturned face and allowed some of the hot blood to drip into his mouth. With a sudden shriek at the drummers and the dancers, who increased their efforts, he began to pluck the rooster, throwing the white feathers among the disciples, who picked them up without ever halting in their gyrations. They seemed to attach some superstitious value to those feathers. Tamayo, in the mean time, put the plucked fowl—without disemboweling it—into the great witch-pot over the fire.

"Chicken-broth!" chuckled McBeth.

But nothing could have induced me to sample it, especially when to the soup-pot was added an *iguana,* which was plunged, living and emitting its raucous squawk, into the scalding brew. And at the death-squawk of that hideous but—they say—edible reptile, the drummers and dancers let their joy be unconfined, while the contortionist file-and-grater artist certainly outdid himself.

It was all very interesting to me. I glanced at McBeth, who lay stretched out ahead of me on the limb. I looked from him to the scene below and at the cairngorm from the dagger of Macbeth set in that hoodoo idol's head. And I thought queer thoughts. The *brujeria*—witchcraft workers dancing around the pot; the guttural sounds of the surrounding jungle; Tamayo, chief *brujo,* placing the giant lizard in the pot—and the descendant of

Macbeth staring down at the strange scene with Heaven knows what thoughts moving in his own mind.

> Double, double toil and trouble.
> Fire burn and cauldron bubble.
> Fillet of a fenny snake. . . .

And then my heart momentarily stopped beating. I was nearer to the fork of the tree than McBeth and all at once I became aware that a third person was crouched on the limb between me and the crotch of the *ceiba*. It was a half-nude figure, black as Tophet, the only relieving points two shining eyes.

My hand crept to the automatic. The eyes turned upon me and I heard a faint voice, chattering with fear.

"*Buccra,*" it whispered almost incoherently. "See me yah, sah? Me beg yoh wan piece a silvah fo' put under me tongue!"

It was the Jamaica boy—my man Friday. Vastly amused in the reaction from fright, I groped in my pocket, found an American half-dollar and passed it to him, hoping it would at least keep him quiet. With the utmost solemnity he took it, opened his capacious mouth and stuck that half-dollar under his tongue. After that he seemed more at ease and settled down on the limb behind me to his own peculiar enjoyment of the affair.

But the interest suddenly took a tragic turn. As if cut off by a pair of shears the "music" ceased, the dancers came to a halt and all eyes turned toward Tamayo. That devil-person had dramatically thrown off his enveloping blanket and stood up straight and menacing before the idol, his right arm aloft, his saturnine countenance, stained with blood, turned to the worshipers and his demoniac eyes ablaze. He wore nothing but a snake-skin belt and a pair of grass sandals.

Not a word did he say, but the arm came down with a gesture of absolute command and finality. Down upon their faces fell the worshipers, all except the woman who had served Tamayo the offerings to *obi*. This creature ran to the baskets and took from one that was slightly larger than the others something that looked like a bundle of rags. But a faint wail came from it and then I knew that they had a baby there—a human baby!

CHAPTER V.

FRIDAY AND THE FINISH.

"DON'T like that!" I heard McBeth mutter.

But he did not move—just then. Neither did I. I was paralyzed with a certain fear, a fearful certainty. It was, then, not all story-book stuff? Had we happened to stumble on a first-class revival of the old heathen rites?

I was ready to do anything, but somehow initiative had deserted me for the moment. Perhaps I still relied on McBeth's leadership. Perhaps, after all, I was merely anticipating, and imagination's preconception had got the better of my sense of probabilities. There was yet time enough. One shot would prevent the thing, although into what dilemma that one shot might plunge us I hated to think.

My eyes had never left the scene below. Again came a whimpering sound, but this time it was not a baby note, but the deep-breasted sound of a woman sobbing, yet fearing to let her sobbing be heard. I traced the sound to the outer circle, at the point farthest from the *brujo*-doctor, toward whom the pain.ed woman was advancing with the infant, now unwrapped from its rage and squirming in her upheld hands. The other woman, she who sobbed, was flat on the ground, but her face was slightly raised and the eyes that stared at Tamayo were the eyes of Rama.

It was then that I realized the whole brutal truth. They had taken her infant from her to be a human sacrifice to the evil god, *obi*. And she—poor, ignorant wretch—had been compelled to submit to the decree of Tamayo, high priest of *obi*, to keep silent—for she herself was of the cult!

My heart bled as I looked down on that woman where she lay, powerless, herself as much a victim as her child, her only fault that her baby was as nearly *white* as *obi* could desire. My hand was on my automatic and I had drawn it, when—

"My dirk!" I heard McBeth exclaim under his breath.

I did not look at my host, my attention being further riveted by the new link in the chain of circumstance. Tamayo had taken the whimpering child in his left hand, holding it up by the feet. In his right hand had appeared a curiously shaped two-edged knife—a highland dirk—McBeth's at a glance!

So! It had all been part of the same mumbo-jumbo scheme—the cairngorm, the dirk, the baby. But it was no time to attempt reasoning about the processes of the connection. Tamayo was getting ready for that one stroke which would spill the child's blood most rapidly.

A cold sweat was upon me. I forgot McBeth. I did not even wonder what he might be doing or planning to do. Only I saw. Only I obeyed that impulse which makes a white man respected. I leveled the automatic, resting it on the *ceiba* limb, and took careful aim at Tamayo's heart. But between the command of the brain and that command's transmission to my forefinger, another hand than mine took charge.

McBeth dropped from the limb directly over Tamayo's head! I did not know he had left my side and crawled further out to that vantage point. He threw all his weight of bone and sinew astride the high priest's neck. I heard something crack. I saw Tamayo collapse like a tree struck by lightning, McBeth on top of him. I heard the wail of a child and the cry of a woman. I saw Rama dash forward and snatch up her *pequeña* from the beaten ground. I saw a great stirring among the *obi* worshipers. All these things I heard and saw in a flash, and lastly, the fallen Tamayo roll over on his back, revealing the dagger of Macbeth sunk to the hilt in his ribs.

Whether he was quite dead, whether his neck was broken under McBeth's terrific descent, whether McBeth turned the dirk upon Tamayo or Tamayo fell upon the weapon in his own hand—I do not know—McBeth has never expressed his own opinion.

But all these things happened in a few seconds before a greater semblance of hell broke loose upon that scene.

"To me, Blythwood!" roared McBeth from where he stood with his legs planted wide apart over the body of Tamayo. In his right hand he held a revolver with which he fanned the air before that howling mass of black barbarians.

What had become of man Friday I did not know. It was a moment for but one thought at a time. McBeth's revolver spat fire and a gigantic negro who had attempted to rush him crumpled up and fell. At the same instant I, having crawled farther out on the limb, dropped at McBeth's side and opened fire with my automatic. My appearance, coupled perhaps with the fear that my armed people were behind me, checked the threatened rush for a few moments.

"Hold them a second!" said McBeth in my ear.

Out of the corner of the eye that was trained along the automatic-barrel I saw McBeth lean over the body of Tamayo, then disappear for a moment behind me. At that the mob came on with a sudden outburst of rage. I know now that it was McBeth's action which goaded their fury beyond fear of our weapons. He had plucked the dirk from Tamayo's heart, turned around, reached up and coolly pried the rest of his ancestral property from the brow of the great god, *obi*.

But a second later he was back at my side. Between two quick shots into the shrieking, seething blacks he said:

"Got it, Blythwood. But we're tight fixed."

We were. I did not have an extra clip for my automatic. I doubt if McBeth had shells other than those in his two revolvers. When the first of the latter was emptied he thrust the weapon into my left hand as he drew his loaded second and grunted:

"Club! You'll need it. Better than automatic."

And then, without the slightest warning, the *brujo* people scattered and took to the bush. In ten seconds we had that arena all to ourselves, except for the body of Tamayo and a sobbing woman who crouched against the cliff wall behind us with a baby in her arms.

McBeth was not deceived, however;

neither was I. Swiftly we looked around for shelter. I was for taking to the jungle to our left or right on the chance of escaping in the darkness; but McBeth did not even comment on the suggestion. His eyes were fixed on the wall of rock behind the idol. There the cliff slanted inward slightly—off plumb.

"In here!" he snapped. "Mumbo-jumbo will protect some. They've no guns. Rocks from above won't touch if we hug close."

So in we got, flattening ourselves and compelling the woman to do likewise against the in-slanting face of rock. *Obi*—or mumbo-jumbo, as McBeth contemptuously called the thing—formed some sort of protection in front.

Presently a rock crashed down from above, dropping in the narrow space between us and *obi*.

"Hope they don't hurt jumbo," said McBeth coolly. "So far, so good."

Yes—but how was it to end? I had no answer, nor had McBeth. That answer, however, came unexpectedly, although not before we had spent nearly an hour, besieged by stones and rocks, watching the demolition of that partly protecting idol in front, dreading what would happen to us when the fire died down and went out, leaving us in darkness.

The answer was announced in due time by an uproar which told its own story. Man Friday was our salvation. Seeing our peril he had discreetly descended that tree by the regular route, made all speed through the jungle over the ridge to the camp of my people and removed the half-dollar from under his tongue just long enough to make himself understood.

The way those coast fellows sailed into their own people was a racial disgrace. But then they were highly civilized persons from the city and they had two *generales* among them, to say nothing of guns and ammunition and a chance to shoot off the latter.

But we did not have it all our own way even then. We fought a retreating fight right back to McBeth's place; and there we were besieged all night, while at the advice of my host, I packed up for a hurried trip to the coast. He had decided that a vacation was about due himself, meaning, however, to return to his gold concession when the time was ripe to work it.

Thrice during that night the *brujo* people fired the bungalow, and as many times we extinguished the blaze and fired the enemy! At dawn we started for the coast—four days of hard going. Not a soul was in sight as we marched out of that settlement; but that the *brujos* were still on the warpath was evident in the several ambushes and more or less open attacks we suffered during the first two days and nights. Then they gave us up.

We had taken man Friday and Rama and her baby along with us. On the way Rama told her story to McBeth. It was she who had pried out the cairngorm at the order of Tamayo. When that devil-person noted the awe with which his less intelligent associates regarded the strange yellow stone, doubtless the idea dawned of making it an *obi* fetich and the knife to which it belonged. Rama, again at Tamayo's secret command, filched the dirk from McBeth's sheath while we slept and Tamayo probably decided to "consecrate" it as the sacrificial knife of his voodoo altar.

The unfitness of choosing Rama's baby as the first victim of the knife the baby's mother had stolen, probably never occurred to that devil-person, Tamayo.

Man Friday, I duly rewarded with enough silver to keep off *obi* for a year or two at least. I shipped him back to his own island, Jamaica, after vetoing my own thought to keep him as a henchman. Rama and her child were turned over to the care and the discretion of the American consul at ——

Well, he is still, I believe, in office there and he had trouble enough with us at the time. He had hard work keeping us under cover at the consulate and getting us out of the dark island where we had violated, with armed force, the lives, personal liberty and spiritual happiness of a people who, as Professor Provan more than ever maintains—

However, McBeth says he is going back; and it would be just like him to do it!

(The end.)

Janie and the Waning Glories

by Raymond S. Spears

Author of "Janie Pays a Deb. of Honor," "Dancing Laura," "A Shortage in Perfumes," etc.

(A "JANIE FRETE" STORY)

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

JANIE FRETE (a self-reliant young woman well known to most of our readers from her appearance in earlier stories) one day received a communication from one Tremaine Valero, of Racklack County, Nevada, concerning "her" ranch in the Waning Glory Range and Thirsty Creek Valley. Search in her files disclosed a set of legal documents concerning this ranch, and a court order to "settle with the White Face Cattle Company for accrued damages, if any." But Janie had no other knowledge of any such ranch. Determined to get to the bottom of the mystery, she went West, traveling from Salt Lake City toward Nevada by automobile, alone.

Meanwhile, in Reno, Mrs. Uintah Forelane, a woman who had unjustly used Janie's name in getting a divorce from her honorable husband, was interested in the Sage-Alkali Lands, Inc.—and, together with Valero, in the ranch of which Janie had come into unexpected possession. Mrs. Forelane was accepting the attentions of Timmy Ferule, a futile Eastern man with more money than brains, but her heart was not involved.

On the desert Janie overtook a man almost spent by want of food and water. She fed him, and he went on, after learning that she was bound for Racklack. He was Daries Flange, a cowman, who had killed a rich and ill-tempered ranch owner, Asra Clement. A posse led by Clement's foreman, Bleak Grisp, was on his trail. A woman of the desert, called Mother Mountain, helped Flange's escape, and advised him to head for the old Trenal ranch in the Waning Glories, whose honest owner had been killed while involved in trouble with the adjacent White Face and Marvelando outfits, against whom Mother Mountain warned Flange.

CHAPTER VIII.

"YOU AND I."

THE appointment made, or rather declared, by Valero with Mrs. Uintah Forelane at her office for ten o'clock on the morning following their encounter in the Purple Shadows was scrupulously kept by both of them. It proved to be a rather anxious occasion for both.

Valero ran around to Credo Hill in his roadster and, with a rather sharp step, walked past the clerk, stenographer, office boy and vice-president of the company into Mrs. Forelane's presence. They confronted one another, standing at first on either side of her table-desk, but sat down quickly after quite formal greetings. Then he said, without hesitation:

"Your scorn does not add to any man's prestige here in our lines of business; I thought last night that it might be possible for us to come to some understanding; there is at least no bluff—not much water—in my business."

"Not much water, I'll admit," she smiled, and he flushed at her cutting wit. The one great problem, the solving of which would mean to him and others uncounted millions, was getting water out upon the otherwise nearly worthless "agricultural lands" that formed the basis of his speculations and hopes.

"I've news for you," he shifted the topic

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for May 15.

to one more interesting. "Janie Frete is coming out here. She has left Salt Lake City, and is coming into Racklack from the East."

"Really—she fell for it?"

"See for yourself."

He handed her a telegraph message, and she read:

TREMAINE VALERO,
Reno, Nev.

Miss Janie Frete, good friend of mine, is on her way through your country, by auto. Watch out for and take care of her, won't you?

WORLAND FERVIL.

"'On her way through your country'?" Uintah raised her eyebrows. "And who is Worland Fervil?"

"We started together from Amsterdam, New York," Valero explained. "We belong to the same Old Home Club, and he probably found my address in the list of members, and didn't know that—er—I'd be looking out for Janie, anyhow."

"Seems to me she has her share of masculine protection," Mrs. Forelane suggested, rather edgedly.

"And most needlessly, too, as a rule," he mused. "She's quite self-sufficient. You ought to make her acquaintance—meet her, and all that, you know."

"Oh, I've met her."

"Eh—really—you have? You didn't say so!"

"Quite unnecessary for me to sound her—well, welcome."

"But isn't she a wonder?"

"I've found her useful," Mrs. Forelane remarked indifferently. "I hope you may find her quite the same in your enterprise."

"And she's coming out? How she'll laugh—at the ruse! It 'll be just what 'll strike her—the ruse!"

"Your appointment with me?"

"Just this: that when Janie appears I may count on you to—well, look after the feminine honors of the occasion. You see, I've been bluffing to a certain extent; who wouldn't? When she appears she'll have no idea whatsoever as to who this Valero, this Tremaine Valero—her real-estate agent—is. But when she sees me—you understand—one time—"

"Oh, you had an encounter with her?" she demanded narrowly.

"Just the slightest; I could never forget. Perhaps she has; my name did not matter at all. I carried her suit-case, so to speak, and introduced her to a pearl broker. She is a wonder in the pearl business, and for a time was field-buyer of button-shellers' pearls and baroques."

"Oh, a *business* acquaintance?"

"That's all—a chance acquaintance—that she made memorable. I'm forgotten; but I never lost track of her afterward. I know—I know she will enjoy this little—er—affair. It's just in her line."

"You know she'll enjoy it?" Mrs. Forelane smiled oddly. "Isn't knowing things a great consolation? So I'm to entertain this lady friend of yours. Janie Frete 'll be—you've not the least idea how pleased she'll be over your looking out for her, after she arrives in Reno, Nevada. She'll come direct to Reno?"

"I suppose so, but I haven't heard anything but Fervil's word. Oh! No, she won't. I am, as you inferred, an ass! I used my Racklack letterhead in writing her. She'll go there."

"Such a bright thing to do, give her a bird's-eye view of that—that blistering, salted Hades before she sees our own lovely and shaded Reno. What will she think—having seen our countless miles of arid desert, unwarned and none to display its loveliness, its—I might say—strong points. I can fancy that her stops will be brief, her days' mileage long, and her passage to the orchards of California exceedingly rapid, not to say precipitate."

Valero's expression turned glum. A little thing had sprung up to torment him as another unconquerable blunder. What would Janie Frete think if, coming in from Salt Lake City, she struck the Great Salt Lake desert first, and then the miles of sage, alkali, spotted mountains and stony gulches, with more miles of alkali, more sage, more mountain range and mountain pass? Mrs. Forelane had exposed his own fallacy and error.

"I thought she'd come by train," he exclaimed.

"To Racklack?" the woman taunted him,

"Can it be possible that one of the forty projected railroads has slipped into Thirsty Creek Valley unknown to me?"

"Ugh!" he shook his head, "I meant to Reno, first. Reno's all there is to Nevada; all any one ever heard about us, east of the Rockies."

"Our mines, stock range, timber, and up-cropping undeveloped resources are nothing—mere buried data in unread United State Geological Survey reports," she said absently.

"I'll go out and see; I'd better," he suggested.

"To Racklack?" she asked. "How lovely—a ride out there—over the L-Way and up to Racklack! You'll run out this afternoon?"

He cringed and laughed. Then his glance turned to the map of Nevada on the wall, and the amused hurt left his eyes, so that there could come to them his real feelings toward that State. His look leaped from range to range of mountains, from valley to valley of, as yet, unconquered desert, his thought rested upon Eureka, Hamilton, and Virginia City, whence had flowed silver in such vast quantities that a nation had been saved by sinews with which to make war; the map displayed uncounted towns whence fortunes were annually being dug out by brawn and power—and all that had been uncovered, all that had been broken or blasted out of that up-cropping of a hundred kinds of minerals, was, as he knew, but a modicum, but a pittance, but a mere handful from plenty beyond a great nation's dreams of fortune and hopes of wealth.

"Yes," he admitted after a minute, "I'll run out there, Mrs. Forelane; I'll start this afternoon; and I'll cross a thousand kingdoms to the Waning Glory Range. I cannot do it this afternoon, for one cannot go through so many domains in an hour or even in a day.

"That's right, we can't. And I for one am glad of it. If the work had all been done, and the whole country opened up, there'd be nothing left for me to help do. That's the way I feel about it."

"I wish the thing was done, and I—and that I had my share," she exclaimed, seriously and with unforced tartness. "I want it! And I want to get back—get back to God's country."

"Oh, that 'd be fun! I'd like to go back, too," he admitted. "But, you know, I'm getting so I don't feel lonesome in the alkali."

"Hobo of the arid lands," she laughed.

"I'd come back," he declared doggedly. "I would; and I'm not ashamed of knowing I'd come back. It's a hard land. It's caked and baked and crusty, but God never made it to be hated. It's a man's land—"

"Except some few tracts that females happen to have in their names."

"That's so; but even so, mortgages—"

She laughed lightly and delightedly.

"That is so," she cried. "What humor—and our scheme 'll work—"

"I—yes—but we can't, we'll have to make it right with—"

"Business is business." She clicked her teeth. "Remember, I'm not going to have you go soft in this hard land; I'm going to have something to say in this matter. Ideas—ideas full of good, pay-streak and dividend-bearing kind—aren't going to be wasted because of any tender sentimentalities.

"Don't you forget that. I'm in on this, and I'll have my share. Don't forget that. Now go to it. The best thing for you to do is go to Racklack and make the most of your opportunities. Then, when we've made our piles, you and I— There! I've admitted it at last. You and I—lil old N'York, eh? And our yacht down the West Indies, and winters in the Mediterranean, and—and all the things we want. You and I, eh?"

She leaned toward him, and he sat fascinated, staring at her. At last Uintah Forelane had bared to him her heart, and the years that he had been laying siege to her, the times he had come and gone, the humble serving, the despairing flings, the patience and conservatism were promised their reward.

This woman—this young, alert, bright, competent, independent woman had succumbed to his campaign. She burst out upon him at a most unexpected moment, with a declaration of her intention—her thought to fly with him to all the gay places of the earth to enjoy the fortune-to-be, their

own recoverings from the stern and difficult deserts and mountains of Nevada.

She had swept from his thought the confession he had made of his yielding to the desert lure; certainly New York and the tropics and the playful culture of Europe would stifle for all time any slight and temporary liking for the colorful, but desperate, deserts. Ease, forever, must bury in oblivion any desire for hardship.

CHAPTER IX.

PANIC ALERTNESS.

VALERO rose impatiently to be upon his errand to Racklack court. He'd consummate the business, gather in the proceeds in unlimited wealth, and then —Uintah glided around the long, wide, mahogany desk to his side.

From her fell every least suggestion of the business woman. She drew up to him and, rising in sinuous fascination upon her toes, she let him, for the first time, clasp her about the waist and draw her lips to his in luxurious embrace. Not for long, but long enough to make her always a presence in the consciousness of his life, and then she sped him on his journey—to make their fortunes.

When he was gone, and when she was sitting alone at her desk, she laughed noiselessly.

"I guess he'll escape Janie," she mused. "I've given him something to think about; the main idea is to get to a man first, so he can't see over one's own head. Now for—"

And with that she drew up the basketful of untended correspondence, and calling a stenographer she proceeded to the details of what was in fact a large and varied business. Just to indicate it, she sold a corner for seven thousand six hundred dollars that morning, entered upon negotiations for an irrigation project farm on the Truckee Bottoms, and made an appointment with her dressmaker; a very busy woman was Mrs. Uintah Forelane.

She had about decided to order lunch when a messenger-boy rode up on his motorcycle, and a telegram was brought in. The message made her laugh, though she already knew the fact without the details:

Frete left Salt Lake Stulander Campers' Model alone—what do you think—first night Johnson's Pass. Going to hunting ground ahead of her.

ASRA CLEMENT.

"That's something like!" the young woman smiled. "Asra 'll take care of things out there. He'll check up on Valero, too."

She went to look at her wall-map of Racklack County, and with much satisfaction she repeated her examination of the details, though this wall-map was a mere government land-map, with none of the intimate notations which appeared on the surveyor's sheet, with the countless private and confidential markings which she had, the previous evening, spent so much time over. It was as though she would try to put herself in the place of the newcomer, and see what she would see, without the knowledge that one acquainted would have —with just the bare fact of the valley before her eyes.

She was standing there, laughing—a genuine, if difficult laugh to indicate. Just such a laugh some cruel hunter might have when he saw game going into an unescapable trap, and while she was still smiling, though she had run the map up on the roller and had returned to her desk, the messenger-boy returned. He handed the secretary a message, and as soon as it was signed for, the envelope was brought to Mrs. Farlane.

St. John, Utah.

UINTAH FORELANE,
Reno, Nev.

Asra Clement murdered by cowman Daries Flange this morning.

BLEAK.

"What! What!" the woman gasped, turning white. "Clement murdered! I wonder if he—if he provided for the company—for me?"

For minutes she stood there trembling and on the verge of panic. It seemed to her as though disaster had overwhelmed her at the moment of her best triumph, and when she left by the private door, sprang into her automobile—a beautiful roadster—

she turned along the speed-worn highway eastward into the country, where the crude and developing irrigation project is fighting and slowly overcoming the sand and sage, the bare desert, to make it pleasant and restful farm land.

She drove down the Truckee River for miles, till she was far out in the sparsely settled lands, agitated and distraught by the tragedy that had happened—not the tragedy that had murdered a man, but the selfishly ominous mishap to her own affairs, by which she was in danger of losing at a critical moment the money backing that was enabling her to conduct her business on a plane adequate to her ideas and abilities.

The instinct of a wounded animal was hers—hard hit, she had fled to cover, where the spectacle of her anxiety would not encourage or please her enemies. She did not even know that she was fleeing from observation, that she drew the curtains of her car to hide the worry she showed in her expression.

Almost unconsciously, she ran out into a by-road that led nowhere, and all huddled up, actually crouching, her hands clasped up under her chin, and her knees drawn up to her elbows, she strove to bring order out of her chaotic thoughts—out of the calamity that had befallen her affairs.

And at no time in her rather varied and checkered career had she shown her resourcefulness quite so well as now. In panic, in dread, and with what seemed a certain crashing failure menacing her, she marshaled her forces and at last fixed her attention upon the one hope that she could see—a hope such as makes weak people merely hesitate at crime, and which makes the reckless and wanton leap to anything that seems a life-line or haven of self-preservation.

Hours elapsed; she forgot hunger nor realized her thirst; her physical wants were forgotten, though commonly she was petulant for her luncheons, anxious for the china-cup wine stimulant, and even angry against the delay that kept her from her black coffee or strong tea.

Suddenly, out of the dreadful excitement and panic alertness, she started up with a bit of laugh, a hard smile that did not enhance the expression of her countenance, but revealed its lack of real comeliness, and brought out the artificial coloring of her face and throat in their tawdry commonplaceness.

"Fool that I am!" she laughed, tittering. "Why, of course, he didn't dare leave such things around home, back in his own safe! Was ever any one so lucky as I am?"

She backed her car out of its ravine road, and returned to Credo Hill, and clicked her heels upon the polished hardwood, as she entered her private office. She locked the doors, having told her secretary that she must not be disturbed by any one, for anything, and then opened the great safe door, and swung wide the inner plates, to confront, in the upper right-hand corner, a drawer that was labeled:

SILENT PARTNER

She tried this drawer, and found it locked. She knew it would be. She knew that the key to this drawer was on the ring that Asra Clement always carried. For a minute she hesitated at this thing which she was about to do—hesitated, as all those must hesitate when they confront the necessity of actual crime.

Then she looked around, saw nothing with which to work; unlocked the private street-door, and went out to her car and raised the seat to get into the tool-box. Near the top was a most useful of little tools—a claw-bar and hook. She slipped it into the loose front of her blouse, returned to the office, and all locked in again, set the straight claw into the top of that silent-partner drawer.

In half a minute the most efficient jimmy did its work, and she had before her the five-by-three-by-ten-inch space. That space contained several papers, and she caught up one with a gasp of thankfulness. It was a legal document, wrapped up in blue legal-folder, and the back of it was duly labeled:

SAGE-ALKALI LANDS, INC.
AGREEMENT.

There it was, the brief page of Asra Clement's mortgage upon the "business, property, equities, profits and all possessions whatsoever, including all rights, increments

and valuables of Sage-Alkali Lands, Inc., until said loan and mortgage is wholly satisfied and partnership herein described is terminated by mutual agreement or otherwise, but according to law."

She read the paper carefully and sat in deep thought for a long time. Under this paper the injured wife of Asra Clement would fall heir to his interest in Sage-Alkali Lands, Inc., of course. What Mrs. Clement would do to that corporation needed no description for Uintah to imagine.

The promise was of great profits; already there was a fortune involved, but the indication was that great wealth would come to the owners of this speculative company. In this one paper was the gist of the matter—it was a fifty-fifty proposition when it came to the divide; but Asra Clement had made it all his own, subject to his own agreement with the other principal. He had invested in the company not only the fifty thousand dollars that was the capital on which business was done, but a loan of fifty thousand dollars more, to take up certain areas and to enable the company to have a cash balance on hand.

It was a complicated legal problem that Uintah Forelane studied that afternoon. Asra Clement, shrewd cattle and mine man, first-class poker-player and wanton sport that he was, had given her full opportunity for all her talents, and had been very generous with her—in a way.

Now he was dead, and his jealous wife's opportunity had come, if she should know it. Mrs. Clement did know about Uintah, and there had been one meeting, one clash, and then the sullen patience of a wronged wife; the wife's chance was looming now, and the adventuress trembled as she thought of that grim, implacable woman, large-waisted, big-handed, thin-lipped, gray-eyed —the woman who had toiled with Clement through years of poverty helping rope cattle, that he might brand them, helping turn a windlass, that he might get out the bags of ore when he made his first big strike. Then Clement had turned from her for prettier and meaner women, to spend the income on properties that his own wife had enabled him to obtain.

Uintah Forelane did not beguile herself with any nonsense regarding Mrs. Clement. That other woman would rather see all the Sage-Alkali Lands, Inc., prospects thrown to the desert winds than have her rival gain one cent from them.

Clement's rights included supervision of treasury accounts and veto powers. The day Mrs. Clement's attorney took that document into court, in the present condition, Sage-Alkali Lands, Inc., with all its prospects, its real, ready money, and its whole made wealth, would be in limbo, never to be let out again. Instead of millions, Uintah Forelane would receive between ten thousand and twenty thousand dollars at the very most.

That would be the dissolution division. An auction of the assets might enable her to obtain the property—but certainly Mrs. Clement would see that at an auction these assets would not fall into Uintah's hands.

There remained but one other resource —the thing which the woman had seen first and to which she now returned. She would obtain possession of all the assets of Sage-Alkali Lands, Inc., by hook and crook; perhaps, almost certainly, Mrs. Clement did not dream at the present moment of the real conditions underlying the Alkali-Sage Lands, Inc., company. Certainly, only two persons knew the inner affairs of the association—and one of these was dead.

"It 'll be easy—easy as can be. Either way—a transfer, or just a match and a little bonfire! Whichever is best—I wonder—"

Uintah Forelane meditated, then, on the question of which, or what crime she had best commit—wherein the greatest certainty and the most complete safety for herself was to be had. "I'll bet I can do it!" she laughed. "Ah! Janie, you're coming just at the right time."

CHAPTER X.

THE DRY WEST.

JANIE heard at breakfast in Ibabah details of the killing of Asra Clement. It reminded the husband of her hostess of another killing, back in 1887, before the country was all cluttered up with ranches,

peoples, and railroads. That other killing, it appeared, was back on the Little Missouri, or, anyhow, a rancher name of Bennett had a falling out with a cowboy name of Parker—George Parker—and the cowboy just naturally got him—killed him dead.

"An' who you 'spose that G. W. Parker got to be?" the husband of the hostess asked. "I'll tell you," he fairly whispered. "Mr. Parker got to be Butch Cassidy. Yes, siree, Butch himself. And they ain't never got to catch Butch yet. Last I hearn of him he was down near Almy, New Mexico."

"And—I'm from the East," Janie asked with bated breath, "what has—ah—Mr. Cassidy done?"

"Done? Butch Cassidy done? Why, first place—I'm from the East myself. I was borned in Ohio, brought up in Illinois, got educated in Nebraska, and I never did get to a satisfactory country till I came out here. But you know, we can talk about people—not offensively, you understand.

"Being rewarded by Mr. Bennett's friends, Butch got real desperate. First along he rustled beef, kind of heavy, him and Mr. Harvey Logan and Mr.—ah—the Sundance Kid—and the Long Texan—and they took about two hundred thousand dollars' worth along in ten years, and between times, sort of for excitement, they robbed trains, and banks, and so on. And, you know, they never did get Mr. Cassidy, to keep him. They kind of got their hands on him once, in the Black Hills, and other times, but not regularly to hold him.

"And Mr. Logan, also known as Kid Curry, they got him, too, to Knoxville, but except they sent him up for one hundred and twenty years, they didn't really get to hold him, and he's around now, they say—up and down, about the same as usual. But these hold-ups are in an awful minority these days. There's so many people that don't rob you or nothing, that the Hole-in-the-Wall gang, and them kind aren't near so influential as they was before the country got so kind of settled up and irrigated and went dry, and so on."

"But this killing of Mr. Clement by Mr. Flange—who they say done it—kind of reminds of Mr. Parker shooting Mr. Bennett. I'm wondering, you know, the way a man will, if it 'll have a bad influence on Mr. Flange, the way it did on Mr. Parker—kind of a bad influence, you know, being a murderer, and all Mr. Clement's friends hunting for him the way they are.

"I knew Mr. Clement real well, and Mr. Flange, too. I'm neutral, you might say, but it's sort of a puzzle; a man kinda likes to talk about such things, you know; out here a killing is interesting sometimes, you know. I mean a real killing, with points about it, and influential people mixed up in it. Like Mrs. Hastings, you know, over south of the Fish Springs ranch. You know where you passed the wide marsh that the brothers have stocked with musk-rats—"

"Yes, I know—and about Mrs. Hastings?" Janie inquired politely.

"Regular old-time lady, standing right to the breech of her gun and shooting anybody, and not giving a—a, you know, kind of a darn for anybody. Yes, sir! Shot and killed a gentleman, a rancher, and the sheriff and—"

"Oh, Sam! What are you talking about?" the hostess demanded. "What do you mean talking that way? Ladies don't care to hear nothing but killings and vi'lence and those things. Dear me, Miss Frete, don't you think this going dry and shutting up all the—ah—amusement resorts and dance-halls and so on is going to have an awful bad effect on business?"

"I don't know," Janie shook her head. "I've—I haven't studied it from—ah—the national view-point."

"Well, they do think a lot about it out here. Take Ely, f'r example; and Reno, and Carson City—but not Carson so much, for it's been kind of dead anyhow, excepting the Legislature, sometimes; but Ely was real up and lively and lots of excitement till it went dry all over, and you can't shoot the wheel or play cards, not real independent like, and devil-may-care, and spend your money the way you would if you had a few drinks.

"Course there's drinks to be had, but not like it used to be. And the drinks is falling off dreadfully in the taste and down in the kick and up in the price, so it's kind

of killing the towns, anyhow. My gracious! You N'Yorkers and Down Easters in Kansas and so on put an awful dose up for us out here. Nothing to drink but alkali. Gracious!"

When Janie drove on after breakfast, she was interested by the valley, with its little irrigation project and the patches of alfalfa and gardens and tiny homestead houses. But soon her gaze discovered a spotted ridge to the right—north—where clumps of something, cedar or sage, grew scattering on yellow soil, and the effect was that of a vast leopardskin.

Beside the road was a sign, and it said that here was the State-line—Nevada and Utah. She looked into Nevada with a thrill.

She had driven fifty miles the previous day between houses; it had seemed almost natural in view of the fact that the route was through the great Salt Lake Desert; she looked ahead now into a land that was full of mountains in the distance, and vast areas of sage and alkali near at hand. She was surprised, and as she drove on, and for hours saw no one, met no automobiles, and passed only a ranch in miles and miles, a new vision of the country came to her—a view from which she could look over hundreds of square miles and in all the land, side of mountain range or sage plain with a horizon like the sea, there was nothing to fix particular attention, and only sand spirals sucked up by little whirlwinds to lead her glance from the perspective to the wayward and wandering flight of the near to the far, till the very distance was dancing in the undulation of the atmosphere.

Never had Janie felt so much alone, and never had a landscape been more entertaining and fascinating; the West was, in this phase, all new to her. She turned to look at the roadway, the two hard ruts with the bare alkali between, which led her straight into that enchanting desolation. She rode on into sage plains and up over mountains; she followed whither the trail led, and by her map and speedometer estimated her whereabouts, till toward afternoon she saw ahead of her, down a valley, or rather along a valley, black smoke-stacks, belching black fumes and yellow into the sky.

She stepped a little harder on the accelerator, and scurried along for an hour, and the stacks were as they had been; another hour, a third hour, and they seemed to grow a little taller above a rise of ground; and for hours, growing more and more amazed, she rocked and rolled along that level valley bottom, and toward night did raise the black and dusky bulk of some great mining smelter or reducing plant, did get to where she could see the dim houses of a town—just as the electric-lights were turned on and the desert night fell upon the landscape, the mountains being blue, the plains pink, yellow and flecked with dull purple, and gray with young sage, and a lake—she was sure it was a lake of real water, quivering out west of the town, McGill.

Only it wasn't a lake, as she saw when she was within a mile, but a flow of residue from the plant into a sink that might, at some time, have been a dry pond.

She rode into this town along the row of contract workers' houses; she drew into a wide, bright main street, where there was a subdued air of restraint—a sort of company control that held in leash the brightly lighted stores; she saw a perfectly magnificent school and then a community center into which murky men were going to the swimming-pools or showers.

Beyond the business section were more homes, and a wide, stone way going out into the plains again, but sure to lead to Ely. When she looked back she saw away up against the mountain some faintly lighted places, as though they were beyond the limits of the city the company had built and owned.

Ely appeared as a mere spark away off yonder, against the mountain range to westward of the valley. A long time afterward Janie ran into this town, and slowly along the brightly lighted main street. This was the town her hostess in one of the Ibabah boarding-houses had said was hurt by the country going dry.

Standing on the curb was a cowboy—a regular motion-picture cattle-country man. He held in his hand, by the neck, a soda-water bottle, and he was frozen with attention of that blue, half-filled glass.

He was just looking at it, that was all. Janie thought that he was just realizing

something or other, that the most unbelievable thing in the world was happening to him, and he couldn't do otherwise than stare at that bottle in his hand—in *his* hand.

Janie rolled up the street and into the garage where her own make of cars were sold. Every man in the garage sprang to open wide the side doors for her to descend, and when she indicated, seeking to get it herself, the suit-case she required, it was snatched out for her and the quicker man stood waiting while she asked where to go for the night, there being a wide latitude of choice of stopping-places.

Walking up the street, she wondered what it had been before its business and industry died of alcoholic thirst? She heard a distant, suspicious whir, and the man, a youth, carrying her suit-case, indicated one of the places as of particular interest, since right there two men had had a falling out; they were partners, and one had run the liquor end and the other the games. When they fell out they got to shooting, it appeared, and one was hit six times.

"Did he die?" Janie asked.

"Not yet," the other replied.

"Wasn't this in the old days?" Janie asked.

"Old days?" he asked, puzzled. "The shooting was yesterday evening."

"Oh!" Janie exclaimed. "I thought—I didn't quite understand. I thought it was—ah—history you were telling me."

"Yes'm," he said, puzzled.

CHAPTER XI.

"INDEXED, WANING GLORY TRACT."

JANIE was very tired, and when she had obtained a room she occupied it. She would have been glad to go up and down that street; she heard distant music and clickings and whirrings—and voices, singing and boisterous, or both. But while she lingered over her thoughts suddenly she went into oblivion, and slept the sleep which she had earned that long day at the wheel.

In the morning when she went down to breakfast she looked in upon a dining-room that might have been anywhere—that is, anywhere west of Chicago. It wasn't exactly "Down East," as the saying is.

The subtle something, the whole assemblage of appearances, conditions, and—everything—stirred Janie with a new feeling. There was what she knew people called "wine" in the atmosphere about her—a stimulant that made her walk on her toes, so to speak.

She felt buoyant and happy and eager—full of eagerness to be up and doing. But with immobile expression she breakfasted, for she was under the covert or open scrutiny of many men. She soon went to her car and resumed that unimaginable journey along the famous highway that led—to Racklack trail forks.

She looked down into the Big Pit, the other side of the range from Ely, and she looked about at the mines and tailing heaps and the aspect of mine towns—then went on till she was beyond the mines, and out in the hills, in the mountains, and after a time out upon another plain that spread to the horizon, with mountains in peaks beyond the horizon of the plain—and the trail was rutted, sandy, full of chucks, and rougher than any road Janie had ever dreamed an automobile could go over—and yet she drove over it confidently, with even a kind of habit, as though she had already settled down to that kind of travel for the rest of her life.

She could not escape the feeling that this thing was to continue through ages. She had gone so far, and hardly got anywhere except to some mile-posts, like McGill and Ely, that she wondered how much farther she would go, or must go. Miles by scores and hundreds did not adequately measure the impression the ridges of mountains and the valley plains made upon her.

She saw, away over the plain, what she knew must be a house, and when she looked at it through her binoculars she saw that it was a group of houses, within a fence—a corral, a garden fence, a yard, and barns and houses—all small and all distant. For hours she rode along with that one landmark clear and distinct, and after hours she was no nearer to it. When at last she

went over the horizon from it, she had not been at any time within ten miles of that ranch.

The thing was incredible—and in Janie's heart rose a kind of awe, a certain feeling of dread, and yet a wonderful kind of delight. She was flighty, wanted to sing and shout, but did neither.

Instead, she looked ahead into the errand she had undertaken, and asked herself if this was the country of her ranch, and what was behind that announcement to her that "her" ranch was unharmed by cloudbursts, and "her" ranch was wanted for grazing cattle. The landscape resolved itself into ranges of bare mountains and sage plains, crossed by a road that was but two wheel-ruts between alkali levels without visible end.

Every yard of the roadway, however, had to be watched; in places it was as hard and smooth as concrete; in other places it was a succession of short pits, or chuck-holes that were nearly hub deep; occasionally for a few miles she found herself running in ruts that were full of soft, fine flour, a dust that swirled up about the car and covered it with a tawny hue.

The dust flew out from under the tires and fell, fluffing, back into the rut behind them. There were stretches of gravel and sand, and on the approach to a mountain ridge pass even small cobbles and boulders that had washed out in rainstorms of some past age.

So Janie Frete pressed on, in places at five or six miles an hour, and in others as high as fifteen or eighteen miles; she stopped to eat lunches, to rest, to see, and even at times to determine which was her true road, and which a trail out into some endlessness of plain and mountain ridge. She crossed flats where not even sage-brush would grow, not even the stunted sage, but where plain alkali spread out on either side in bare, flat sterility, poisonous to any herb or plant.

And out here Janie saw a herd of horses in a valley where there was no least sign or trace of human occupation, though she looked about with her glasses, hoping to see a ranch, or nester's hut; the horses, seeing her stop, arched their heads and raised their tails; they looked at her with their nostrils distended, with suspicion clearly indicated; on their flanks she saw no sign of any brand, and it dawned on her that these were not tame ranch animals, but wild horses, outlaws, defying successfully the elements and humans. She thrilled at the startling revelation of the place to which she had come.

And out here night fell upon her, degree by degree; the sun set, the dusk faded, and out of the sky shone down blinking stars—a night that was deep blue and purple and which left the plain half-revealed, and the crests of the stony mountains touched with startling lights, and in all directions perfect silence, broken at intervals by weird cries and howls and whispering voices.

Janie rode on an hour or two, and then as she seemed about to be swallowed up by a vast trap in the mountain range, she drew up beside an ancient stone ruin, and would have stopped there had she not heard a horror of whirring and crisp rustling—her spot-light revealed a rattlesnake, sitting back on his tail, head up and fangs distended, all fury in his poisonous rage.

She rode on, and, finding a bare place, stopped, and stepping gingerly about, opened up her cupboard and took out things to eat, poured a cup of hot tea from a double bottle, and finally made down her bed in the car to turn in to sleep. But at intervals during that strange night she was awakened by coyotes howling and other desert voices.

She arrived at last, when she had forgotten the day of the week and the day of the month, at a fork in the road. She was miles from any ranch, and had not seen a town since the previous morning. There at the fork she saw a sign-board, a shield with a large "L" on it, and an arrow pointing toward the southwest; on the other side, on a piece of soap-box, was printed in black paint the single word:

RACKLACK

A crude hand pointed up that fork of the trail toward the northwest, and crowded into the remaining space were the figures "67 mi."

Racklack was her immediate destination.

And when her speedometer registered eighty-three miles, and she had seen no ranch, no cabin, no human or anything but a herd of cattle ten or fifteen miles away over against a range of mountains, she rounded a low mountain, dipped into a valley, and entered upon Racklack.

There were no less than twenty buildings, including an enormous courthouse and jail. The fronts of these buildings on Main Street were reasonably repaired, but, looking through one broken window, Janie felt an utter loneliness as she saw that the rear of that store had fallen outward and that half of the place was in ruins.

The garage, with barrels of gasoline, stood near the courthouse; a freshly painted sign indicating legal business of some kind; two, at least, of the buildings were occupied by more or less going stores; live horses with saddles on were hitched to two pole railings; and there were two or three automobiles standing down the street.

What drew Janie's personal interest, so to speak, was a two-story, long-since-painted building, with a bright new sign:

HOTEL FOR TOURISTS

Accordingly she went to this building, and stopped there. The clerk, with black mustache with waxed ends, swung the register around to her, and she signed her name:

Janie Frete, Two Canoe, N. Y.

"Come all the way in that?" the clerk asked politely.

"No, only from Salt Lake City," she replied, and a half-breed Indian maid, summoned from somewhere or other, took her to a room that seemed to have been waiting for the President, or at least a Governor, for forty years.

There was running water—and Janie saw a two-inch pipe line up an adjacent mountainside—Racklack's water system. It was good water, and below town, in the valley, was a field of alfalfa, where the surplus water irrigated the "farm."

Toward dark a big army truck arrived in town, carrying a dozen or so men, who got down stiffly and marched, two and two, into the jail—while three men, armed with repeating carbines, stood by, supervising the parade. It was a road-working gang of short-term prisoners.

Janie went over to the county clerk's office after supper, and found the recorder there, poring over some documents of legal appearance. He greeted her with a bow and a friendly "Good evening." Then, with a soft smile and a keen glance, he brought out a huge record ledger and opened it for Janie's inspection. And she read:

Frete. Janie; Indexed Waning Glory Range Tract; Beginning Table Mesa Base Line. township 54, SE corner, and westward, 55, unplotted townships, ranges North, 3, 4, guide Meridian including water rts., Thirsty creek, and springs, Arid.

SECTION No. 1. Twp. 54, 640 acres,
grazing..... 100,000 acres.
(Forty, improved, fenced, ranch, corral.)

MORTGAGE.

Janie asked to see a copy of the deed, and read that detailed and precise document in typewriter print, clean and unfaded and filed only eighteen months previous, but backed up by old and worn documents, including "His Mark" signatures.

There, too, among the rest, was the name of Tremaine Valero, who had attended to the transfer, as agent.

"Now, if you will please, I should like to see a copy of the mortgage," she requested; and the mortgage was a considerable document, rather highly involved in its description and exceptions and comprehensiveness, but it was a nice, new mortgage, and, in toto, it covered many acres of land, "including all improvements made thereon, and any that may be made thereon, during the term and life of said mortgage and claim, upon said—etc."

The mortgage was for one hundred thousand dollars, representing "value received," and it was, Janie judged, a thoroughly ironclad document. The mortgage was held by and owned by the "said Marvelando Cattle Company, and Sage-Alkali Lands, Inc., in the proportions of 50 per cent to each, all payments to be equally divided between said corporations, including payments of interest at the rate of six per cent from date."

"That is most unusual," the recorder remarked. "Six per cent is at least two per cent less than usual."

"I should say that it is all very unusual," Janie smiled, and the young man started slightly. "If you will please—a map of Racklack County, so that I may exactly locate the tract."

He handed her a newly printed map of all Racklack County; on this map was printed in bright red ink such magic words as "coal," "silver," "gold," "timber lands," "good grazing," and "rich oil indications." In one corner there were explanations of symbols and scales of miles for general map and inserts. In the other corner, in rather ornate print, she read with the keenest of interest:

With the compliments of Sage-Alkali Lands, Inc.
MARVELANDO CATTLE CO.

"I wonder—could I obtain a copy of this?" Janie asked, and the man presented it to her with a fine bow:

"Any one—every one—can have a copy—with their compliments!"

Janie, a little dazed, returned to her hotel, passing the garage where the alkali dust was flying from her bright, new car under the work of a breed helper. In her room she spread out the map and stared at it with a smile breaking over her countenance.

Then she hurried down to the office of the recorder again, and caught him as he was about to close up for the night.

"Certainly," he promised, "I'll have a complete and certified copy of all the documents in the records made for you. And"—he looked up the street to see that no one was near or listening—"and I think you'd better—ah—examine them very carefully. You know—if you're Miss Frete—there's something—er—well, something—ah—remarkable about this whole affair. But you'll learn about it, around. I can't talk, being as I'm elected and neutral and a public official. I just conform with the statutes; but you kind of talk around—ask around—understand?"

"Perfectly!" she laughed. "I can't tell you how obliged I am for the tip you've given me."

When she was back in the room again she asked herself:

"Did you ever—Janie—in all your days?"

CHAPTER XII.

WANING GLORY RANCH.

TREMAINE VALERO, arriving at Racklack County court, was surprised to find Janie Frete's name on the register of the hotel: she had been there two nights previous, he learned, and had started on the following morning for the Waning Glory Range, news that left no doubt in his mind about the interest Janie was taking in the ranch. She had, however, confided in no one that he could find, and beyond obtaining minute directions regarding the road, which led northward from Racklack, no comment had come from her lips.

Valero went over to the lawyer's office, whose sign Janie had seen, and played poker for a time. Then he turned in for what was left of the night. In the morning he went out upon the young woman's trail in his own car, but with misgivings.

It was well enough to come out on the main highway, but this branch road, which began in a gulch, crossed a pass and went out upon a sage-brush plain that was soon broken by another mountain range, followed by another desert—and at last ending in a ranch—the ranch of the Waning Glory and Thirst Valley.

The roadway, as far as the first plain, was good enough. On the first plain, twenty miles distant, was a cattle range, with a full-fledged ranch—his own Marvelando Cattle Company—but beyond there the trail was only a pair of wagon ruts that led, as he said to himself, "nowhere."

"She couldn't know what she was going into!" he said to himself. "Perhaps she'll stop at the Marvelando and get some one to accompany her."

But when he took the ranch fork, and ran out seven miles to the buildings, the roadway showed that Janie had kept straight on in her car. The print of her

tires was unmistakable—kept straight on and alone.

A little feeling of compunction touched the sensations of Valero, as she went up to the cattle ranch and greeted his foreman, Preston Gasper. Gasper had heard and seen nothing. It wasn't much of an outfit, this Marvelando enterprise—and it was mortgaged up to the tips of the cattle-horns.

Gasper, however, remarked that the rains had done a world of good on beyond the valley, and that there'd be a sight of good winter grazing in the Waning Glories, just like he had said a month or so before, only it was more so now, for he had been up there just the previous week, looking for mavericks—and finding a few, including three heifers, wild as deer and probably some of the old Discole herd. In the mean while no one had gone up there from this end, except the automobile of the day before yesterday.

Valero's conscience was uneasy. It had not entered his calculations that Janie Frete, coming out there, would go up to the Waning Glories alone. He had figured that she would get to Racklack, or perhaps stop at the railroad town down at Greengrass, there to find the remoteness of her ranch requiring a regular expedition to reach it.

"She don't know Racklack County!" he now told himself. "And coming by automobile she'd just naturally think of the roads as regular Lincoln Highways!"

At the same time Valero was rather pleased by the demonstration of the young woman's interest in the ranch. It showed that Uintah Forelane—and wasn't *she* the girl, though?—had been on the right trail, and that they might by good management do all that Uintah had foreseen and hoped for. Janie would be coming down that road before night—a day spent up there at the Waning Glories would satisfy any woman!

She would be coming out, and having discovered what a great, a really great, opportunity was in the ranch, she would immediately seek an agent to manage it for her—perhaps she would even discharge that mortgage, since Uintah knew she was wealthy enough to pay it! Just suppose she should do that! Or pay the interest and a small sum on the principal?

Valero rubbed his hands. Something new in real-estate ventures had been devised, and the hope of fortune was now near realization—once clear of his own obligations, with a little ready money in hand to operate with, and Tremaine Valero would show them! All he lacked was elbow room. And he wished, now, that the mortgage on the Waning Glory Range was eight per cent instead of six per cent. Uintah has held out for eight per cent, but he had urged her not to demand that.

"She's one of those Down Easters," he had persuaded her. "They're all six-per-centers—and lots of them get their money for five per cent. You can see what anybody in business Down East would think of eight per cent. It might frighten her off entirely—if she's the business woman you say, and what they tell around. Anyhow, what we get is all velvet!"

The telegram that said Janie had started West, and the further word that she had outfitted with an automobile at Salt Lake City, and would drive out, had followed one another with startling promptness. Janie Frete was becoming their one best bet!

Uintah's business acumen and divination were astonishing—and Valero, recalling the blissful moment of his latest interview with Uintah, rose to his tiptoes with ecstasy. At the same time he tried to visualize Janie Frete—the woman who had come out to look at a ranch, which she had acquired without, as Valero laughed to think, knowing how in the world she had obtained it.

He watched the Waning Glory trail with the Marvelando glasses, but no automobile appeared that day, and when night fell he thought he would have to go out in the morning, to see that Janie was really all right. His sense of chivalry was touched by the thought that perhaps she had broken something on her car, somewhere out there—happily she had a good camping outfit and probably lots to eat, if she didn't try to walk out!

In the morning, taking on supplies, he drove his own roadster down to the trail

forks, saw that no one had gone through in the night, and headed up the valley on Janie's track. The roadway was surprisingly good for many miles along the open alkali plain.

But, of course, when it went up into the Sunrise Mountains, the cloudburst washes had turned the route into a mere stream bed, with small boulders, steep-banked cuts and steps of various heights which an ordinary driver must have regarded as quite impossible. Nevertheless, Valero saw the big prints of Janie's tires wherever a bit of sand would take the mark, wherever there was a bunch of grass or goldenrod to mash down, and even where there was a rock to scratch off a bit of paint.

She had driven up into the Pass, over the divide and down the far side. He began to listen with considerable anxiety to the squeaks and the strains of his own car, and when, on the down slope of the cañon beyond, there was a sharp crack, and his car lurched to one side and stopped with a jolt against a clay bank, he sprang with some feeling of terror to investigate the accident.

Sure enough, he had broken the steering-gear; the steering-arm-control bolt had snapped off. Happily he was going at only two miles an hour, and, bad as the mishap was, the brakes had prevented a genuine catastrophe. He looked into his tool-box, and found there a bolt that would serve for a temporary repair—after he had filed it down a bit.

Filing it down required three hours of work, and when he had it in place, with a cotter pin through the end to hold it, because he had been obliged to file off the threads, he looked ahead of him down the cañon, hesitated and turned back. He managed, inch by inch, to back the car around and return up the grade he had been descending.

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature!" he told himself, rather grimly, but once clear of the turn he did have the grace to walk down the cañon nearly a mile and out far enough to see that Janie Frete had negotiated the trail which had not only broken him down but turned him back. Of course, there was no telling what might have happened to the young woman beyond, but Valero dared go no farther.

He returned to the ranch, told his foreman what had happened, and went back to Racklack court, to have the repair job made permanent. It was a short job, once a proper bolt was had, but it was night before the car was in shape to try again—and then Valero engaged the garage helper to go with him to drive the car.

His own nerves were not equal to undertaking that journey alone—but the youth from the garage was a capable chauffeur, and they crossed not only the damaged pass, but another nearly as difficult, and ran out in sight of their destination—but still more than two hours from it, because of the condition of the road across the alkali and sage.

The Waning Glory Ranch was on the far side of the Thirsty Creek bottoms, and it looked like a mere rectangle on the side of the mountain range till one was within eight or ten miles of it. Then the details began to be visible, the corral resolved itself into an enclosure, the ranch-house detached itself from the other buildings, and a bright-green tract of herbiage was revealed as a marshland where a great spring snaked out of the mountains down upon the levels.

The ranch-house was a stone building, one story high, with a green painted roof, long low windows high up under the wide eaves, and having a great outside stone chimney which was wide at the base, for the fireplace within. A portico extended clear across the front of it, with high, masonry wall around it, and great stone pillars to support the low roof—in the sunny glare the details of the recesses of the portico were invisible, and the black windows were equally impenetrable to the gaze.

Valero and his companion stared at the group of structures; there was the great pole and sod shade-barn, the corral stockade, the fenced area of inevitable alfalfa, and two or three jackrabbits sitting about in long-eared impudence; an owl perched indignantly upon a wire-fence corner post, blinking. The galvanized iron garage doors were open, however, and an automobile was in it.

The real-estate agent sighed with relief. For some hours past he had been worried by what might have happened to the young woman who had come out there alone, across those desert valleys and over those desolate mountains. He was not in his heart unkindly—and he didn't want any tragedy to be stored up against him personally.

CHAPTER XIII.

IRVING TRENAL'S BEQUEST.

THE impudent jackrabbits, the indignant owl, the alfalfa that had been cropped close, the dark, poisonous green of the salt grass in the marsh, and the tradition that had already grown up around this young ranch, stirred the man who had been working the place for all it was worth. The bungalow with Spanish-mission walls seemed to have, for him, a bit of menace and a threat of haunts.

He started when, as the car drew up at the end of the three-rod-long, rod-wide, stone-paved walk, a figure suddenly stepped out of the black shadow of the porch and ran down into the sunshine.

A slender figure, with pink cheeks and tanned throat, beautiful bright eyes, and graceful approach, dark, fine hair and trim brown boots—a young woman coming to greet the newcomers with a hospitable smile on her countenance, and a level, direct gaze that was unmistakably firm and independent, but evidently glad to welcome visitors!

"Good morning!" Valero raised his broad gray hat, and his chauffeur touched his own greasy vizor.

"Good day! Won't you come in and have a cup of coffee?" she asked. "I saw you coming, and I knew you'd stop here."

"Yes?" he asked.

"Oh, yes—I knew!" she laughed, looking to the northward. "You see, this is where the wagon road—our automobile boulevard, I might say—comes to an end. Beyond here there's a bridle-path—several of them—and some jackrabbit runways. But it would be difficult, I'm sure, to cross the creek—unless you have a shovel."

"Oh, we were coming here, Miss—ah—Miss Frete?"

"My name is Janie Frete," she admitted. "You are—"

"Tremaine Valero."

"Oh—indeed?" She leveled her gaze at him. and the smile disappeared from her lips. A perfectly unreadable expression took the place of the smile—an expression that caused Tremaine Valero to begin to wonder about himself and to turn to look across the valley where the Sunrise Range stood in all the full pink glory of the afternoon sunshine, the leopard-spotted knobs and ridges flushed in the dark places with a blue that seemed partly purple, and the tawny yellow tinged with the flush of rose, touched with violet.

Neither those many rounded hills, nor yet the vast breadths of sage beyond the bit of marsh, nor even the bare, level alkali sink, a lake crusted over with a floor the far side of which seemed blue with rippling waters, inspired him in this moment of his first meeting with Janie Frete.

All aglow with the prospect of fine success in his clever scheme, it had seemed the whole affair but resolved itself into presenting a bill—the mortgage—and collecting the money, with interest to date, and even the fees required at such settlements. But she had said:

"Oh, indeed!"

"A-hem!" Valero managed to ejaculate as a little dust of alkali made his throat itch. His gaze dropped from those distant hills and he touched a pebble with the tip of his brown shoe, the army officer leggings around his shins somehow lacking the feeling of dignity he had heretofore found in them when he was traveling the plains from one prospect to another—mines, cattle, and lands.

"The coffee, I'm afraid, won't keep good forever," she suggested, with an undertone that startled both listeners. "Let us go to it."

She led them to the porch, and brought out a piece of board, serving as a tray, on which were cups and the percolator, sugar and a glass pitcher of cream—condensed, doubtless. There were chairs—two from the automobile and an old but substantial

arm rocking-chair to which she motioned Valero. He took it, but started up, confused by his own impoliteness.

"No, indeed!" he gasped. "That's yours!"

So Janie took the armchair, and rested the board across in front of her, served the coffee, and they sipped—Valero grateful at having something to do while he tried to think what best approach to make. Janie let him think, without assistance. It was his play—his move.

"Sorry I didn't know sooner you were coming!" he made his break. "I wanted to be at Racklack to bring you out—rough road out here, but—but—"

"When one arrives?" she asked, smiling.

"Yes," he admitted. "You can see the finest ranch outfit in Racklack. The grazing lands are—you can see what they are. And—and—"

He hesitated as his glance was led, leap by leap, across the level plain and on to those gorgeous leopard mountains. The thing he would have said, could have said to any one else, died in his throat. For an instant it seemed as though the very best of it all must remain unmentioned, but Janie herself exclaimed:

"And the perfectly magnificent view!"

"Yes—the scenery! Did you ever see anything so—so lovely?"

"It is tragic in its beauty!" she said rather evenly. "Fifty miles to the Marvelando Ranch?"

"Yes—my ranch—"

"Then you came to lease the grazing rights?" she asked, with every show of sincerity.

"Why—eh—you see—"

"Oh—not so much the grazing," she smiled, "as to know what I intend to do about that mortgage—is that it?"

"That's it," he said, with wonder, adding almost under his voice: "You seem to get the idea."

"Part of it," she retorted. "But not all of it. Whatever the idea, I am quite sure it's a wonder!"

Valero had the grace to color as he said:

"There's one hundred thousand acres—and, as you see, water, good water!"

"And dear me! Good water is such a relief! You know, my hands were almost ruined washing in that alkali; isn't it perfectly dreadful? I mean regular, bitter alkali?"

"Yes," he nodded, adding: "But this isn't alkali—that creek; it's regular water, soft and good."

"I see it's good," she confirmed him. "Soap will make a suds in it. That's one thing—real suds!"

"And coffee don't chemicalize in it, either!" the chauffeur declared as Janie poured him another cupful.

"You've been in the South?" Valero suggested, looking at the coffee.

"Yes," she smiled, "and so have you!"

"I—before I settled at Reno, I was in the timber business in Louisiana—on Grand Lake."

"I like New Orleans," Janie said indifferently, returning to business. "I haven't made up my mind yet about this place, Mr. Valero. I have had no time to look into it. Who owned it before it was wished onto me?"

"Eh—why, Irving Trenal."

"*Irving Trenal!*" she gasped. "Oh—this is where he came? And this—I couldn't imagine! I never knew—but—but, Mr. Valero, where is he now?"

"Why—you see—" the man hesitated. "He was—he died."

"Here?" she asked, looking about her. "How he must have loved it here! All this—this magnificent Nature!"

"He was making good here, too," Valero declared. "You can see how he had things fixed up; he had big ideas—irrigation on those flats, you know, and winter grazing back here on these Waning Glory Mountains—some of the best grazing in Nevada, right up these valleys and gulches; then he had cattle—"

Valero stopped short. He hadn't intended to mention too much. There were things which it wasn't necessary to talk about.

"He had big ideas!" Valero repeated. "And he was getting things going good when he was—when he died."

"And how did he die?" Janie asked.

"Why—well, you see, up north of here, in back of the Silver Break Range, there's

a ranch, the White Face Cattle Company outfit. They've got tracts of land scattering, not all in one block like this plot here. They took them up, in the old days, when lands were easier to get than now, and in that breaks you see up there, where Thirsty Creek west fork comes out—it's a dry fork, with just a trickle of a spring hole up there, but enough to water a herd every two days—I mean a thousand head, say.

"Trenal possessed it, and grazed there himself. But there was a dispute over the title, and the White Face outfit—well, nobody knows.

"Things like that ain't done public, you know. Trenal got killed up. Then they sued you—I fought the case for you, 'count of not liking the way things were being done, and it's still in the courts."

"Sued me for trespass?" Janie smiled. "You know, I couldn't imagine what on earth it meant."

"No, I suppose not." Valero stirred uneasily. "Things out here aren't the way they are—ah—Down East."

"No; generally speaking, Down Easters know when they've a hundred thousand acres of land, more or less, unless they happen to be mixed up with some Western real-estate affairs. In that case, apparently, they don't know what they've got—nor even how they got it!"

She spoke rather sharply, and there was an edge to her tone that made Valero quiver. She wasn't accusing him, but she was rather pointedly referring to her own predicament, or whatever it was. It was quite obvious to him that all his finesse was required.

Yet he saw that half his battle was won; Janie Frete had come out to look at this ranch, even though she knew that it had "been wished onto" her. Judging by the commercial agencies' account of Janie's position in the business world, if she took a notion she could take hold of this ranch, pay off the mortgage, or at least the interest, and perhaps even develop it—a circumstance that would instantly enhance the holdings of the Marvelando Cattle Company, and of the Sage-Alkali Lands, Inc. The moment Janie Frete accepted the mortgage it would become negotiable and for practically full value.

Tremaine Valero could hardly believe the appearances of his good fortune—long habituated to studying the expressions of people, he saw that already Janie Frete was charmed by the colorful mountains and the very thought of possessing a hundred thousand acres of land. Who wouldn't be?

He told himself that even that land was worth a good dollar an acre—it might, with a little development and a bit of enterprise and good luck, yield ten, twenty—even fifty per cent on the—well—call it investment—but perhaps speculation would be better.

Irving Trenal had just missed making good—the trouble was he had been killed up. Nobody, probably nobody, would kill a lady, though perhaps they might try scaring her. But honorable citizens of Racklack County wouldn't stand for rough work with a lady—not real rough work, that is. Still, quite a little depended on the lady herself.

Tremaine Valero gazed rather speculatively at the young woman, who was still sipping her coffee as her own glance turned to the wide valley, with its level, colorful bottoms, and its brim of mountain ranges all aglow, all afire with the magnificent flames of unclouded sunshine falling through the haze that spirals of wind-sucks drew up from the flourlike alkali that was loosed by the paws of jackrabbits, by the running about of stunted prairie-dogs and fantail chipmunks, by the passing of coyotes and the tread of wild horses and outlaw burros, even by the hoofs of dainty antelope which still ranged, afraid and timid, in the open plains and up to the gnarled cedar trees of the lower mountains.

"I never thought utter desolation, all colored up the way this is, could be fascinating," Janie confirmed his impression of her feelings, "but this desert is so beautiful! I haven't gotten my bearings yet, but I am thinking about it."

"You've examined the papers?" he asked.

"Not yet," she shook her head. "But I shall do so within a few days. It is very

mysterious—or was, till I learned that Irving owned the ranch. By the way—what *is* my title to the ranch?"

"His titles included Indian land grants to a fur trader—Slassen, by name. These were confirmed by the Territorial courts. Trenal hunted up the heirs—citizen half-breed Indians—and obtained their quit-claims. There were squatter rights, too, and in the case of the White Face suit, homesteads that were abandoned and then taken up again."

"But my title?" she asked.

"When his papers were looked over—they were in a private box in the Racklack County Bank—it was found that he had—h-m—made title over to you about a year after his trouble with the White Face outfit began. You see, he must have looked forward to—well—to shooting. He made it over to you, and as it was about all he had, excepting a bank balance of a few hundred dollars—but it was subject, you see, to the mortgage."

"What did he do with the one hundred thousand dollars he borrowed?"

"Why—er—it was his private business. He was—you knew him?"

"Naturally."

"Kind of a—well, he speculated, you see—cattle—and probably grub-stakes and mines and so on. Oh, he had the money all right!"

"You loaned it to him?"

"Yes—of course—certainly."

"You would like to have it now?"

"Oh, yes!" Valero cried, almost with passion, and then pulled himself together. "But, of course—the interest and—ah—a reasonable payment on the principal. We could—now—"

"I must think it over," Janie said. "There is something—to an Eastern mind like my own—something quite incredible about the matter, except that it was like Irving Trenal. I don't understand his speculating, his gambling. But out here—I suppose the—he changed with the climate, I fancy."

"Yes—that's it! People coming out here—they naturally expand!"

"Too much, at times?" she asked casually; and Valero flushed a little.

She rose, and he took the hint. With but a few words of good wishes, and *adios*, the man and his chauffeur were scurrying away on their return to Racklack—driving fast, so as not to got into the washouts after dark.

They felt in the backs of their necks, for miles, that some one was watching them—the woman, standing alone in the shade of the ranch bungalow porch—such a woman scores of miles away from any neighbor!

"She's got grit!" the chauffeur gasped, and Valero nodded.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE NEW FOREMAN.

DARIES FLANGE walked up the eastern slope of Sunrise Range and looked from a little gap down upon the valley of Thirsty Creek bottoms. It was long before noon, and the light was from behind him, as he sat down on a ledge of rock and gazed ahead.

He was weary, and drank a swallow of water from his linen African water-bag. He also gave his tired horse a little drink of water.

"I reckon we'll make it, old boy," he remarked. "I'm hongry—but we'll make it! I reckon we can get a drink—there! But 'tain't likely a snack—not for me!"

He had no illusions regarding the journey before him. He had lived too long in deserts, and been too often at the beginning of some such day's ride as now confronted him, to mistake the meaning of that vast perspective. He walked on down the mountainside, and it was a long, cattle-trail tramp.

From the little gap down to the level of the plain was a distance of miles—invisible miles. Unless one knew, it must have seemed only a little way—but he knew that the appearance was a lie. The mountains were great mountains, and the plain was a vast level bottom, with nothing by which to measure it. It was miles, after the peculiar gentle slope of the plain rim was reached down to the dead level of the caked alkali. From there the stretch across it was like

the quivering level of a lake with a shore on the far side dimly visible and dancing in the mirage.

This alkali and sage plain danced in a mirage; it seemed to have a beach and a blue, rolling pond with waves breaking on the beach; but Daries Flange had no illusions in his mind to correspond with the vision that afflicted his eyes; if there was water—which he knew was doubtful—it must be bitter as brine.

Doggedly he tramped along, leading his horse, which lagged at the bridle end. Head bowed, dry-sweated, and mouth open, he plodded on. He stepped into his own shadow, then walked beside it, and, with his hat brim down, bucked into the glare of the descending sun. It was a hot sun, but not the hottest sun he had ever known—for that fact he was grateful.

Still, it was hot enough, and up and down the plain he saw little wisps of spirals—sand-storms that waltzed down the light wind and carried the fine dust up into the sky, where it hung, in a haze, the heavier particles falling slowly and many of them resting on the man and on his saddle. His saddle bore evidence of his regard for his brute companion.

The saddle was covered with dust, thick with dust at that. There were streaks in this dust, where the man had leaned upon the saddle, at some time in the past, while resting, and talking to his horse as he talked now in an undertone to the animal.

"You old fool, you!" the man said. "Wore out hoss, you! Don't you know it 'd be easier for me to carry that saddle than to tow you 'long, the way I be, like you was an Erie Canal boat? Bet if I took off your bit an' uncinched the saddle, you'd kick up your heels an' be an outlaw in four minutes—bet you shore would!

"Theh's outlaws round here—wild hosses, an' jacks! Yes, sir! Jacks has riz and throwed off the gov'ment of man—an' gone free an' wild! And me and them's alike—we've all riz and throwed off the thraldom of man! We're on the brim of the world, ready to jump off—should we see somebody coming with a lariat or a warrant, or any of them things!"

His voice fell to a thick-tongued whisper—his voice became a mere thought, which was broken in his head by the steadily rising tide of his own heart-beats, throbbing as he tramped on, one thought now in his mind, one instinct to keep him going, as it seemed, forever, and as it almost was, to the brim of the earth.

He blinked at times, as he lifted his eyes to look ahead to where the Waning Glories raised their myriad peaks and knobs and heads. As the hours went by, he could see hardly any change in their appearance. They were still far away; they were laved at the foot by mirage lakes and false, atmospheric waves; they were, at last, dusted and sun-dogged with haloes of gold and flaming waves of blinding sky-lights, as the sun set steadily down to them, and in a blaze of burned orange glows, sank behind the range, whose shadows turned a rich purple, and whose far eminences were sky-blue in their ethereal heights; there smote the walker's face a chill breath that turned his dry-sweat to a raw, bleak, shivering cold.

In an instant the radiance of a hot day changed to the cutting blast that seemed to flow from an arctic field of ice. The horse shrank quivering from the night wind and then stumbled along on bending forelegs, as the man led the way, hardly conscious of his endurance, and feeling perhaps as though this was his particular hell, and that he would be plodding on forever, dragging his horse after him.

He went out upon a baked alkali lake, without a living thing on it, and he was grateful, because there was no stalk of young sage there to hold back the toe of his boot. He had become so sensitive to resistance, that even a wisp of bunch grass, a few tiny wires of curly yellow blades had cost him a conscious effort to get partly through and partly over it.

Beyond the alkali was sage—young, gray sage, and beyond that sage-brush eight inches high, and beyond that more sage, but the horse was no longer leaning back against the drag of the reins. The horse was brightening, it was walking more firmly, its breathing was coming faster and eagerly, and though it was still a long way off, there was water within smelling dis-

tance, and toward midnight they arrived at the rivulet, where it ran down into the marsh, and there the two drank.

A few hundred feet distant was the dark, gray group of ranch buildings, and having quenched their thirst the two went up to them. Flange let down the gate and turned his horse into the alfalfa, having taken off the saddle and bridle; then he straightened his shoulders as he walked confidently up to the ranch-house.

"I'd know hit!" he shook his head. "Hit's Trenal's place—all built fancy with a stone house and so on. To-morrow I'll find them boys over to the Waning Glories, somewheres—but I'm hongry. I'll eat my snack, what's left, and kill a sage hen or some chickens to-morrow morning.

"There's some around here, they said. I got some salt. I'll go inside and I'll bunk down. Likely I'll find some old blankets around, and I'll—"

He stopped short and stood blankly gazing into a blinding flash-light. His surprise was complete.

"Hands up!" somebody said, and he dropped his saddle, which he was carrying in, and half raised his hands. In one of them was the precious water-bag, now full and dripping again.

Then Daries Flange froze where he stood. For a minute, he had been forgetful of his condition—a murderer in full flight. Lately he had been just a thirsty man striving with all his endurance to reach a spring at a deserted ranch, which he had had described to him.

Now there fell upon him the dreadful realization that he had been captured. As in a dream, he saw himself a prisoner, carried the half thousand miles to Utah, lugged into court, tried by a jury picked by unfriendly people, convicted, of course, for murdering Clement—and taken out, with the choice of being hung or shot! It was the first moment of awful realization in the fugitive's heart, and he was desperate—hopeless—and yet unwilling to die right there!

"Why—you!"—the voice continued, and Flange knew it was a woman's. "You've brought back my water-bag?"

Who was talking—what was she saying—where was he? Daries Flange had another amazing moment.

"Just a minute, please, and then—I suppose you're hungry? I'll light a lamp, and I'll let you in, and I'll get you something to eat. Men are always hungry! Sit down—there's a rocker—right there!"

The flash turned from him and indicated a rocking-chair on the porch which he had ascended. He staggered to it and slumped into the leather seat. Action, reaction, endurance, and shocking surprise—Flange's moment of hesitation and marshalled strength abandoned him as he let go all holds to find in the rocking-chair the rest his whole body craved.

There was a light within, by this time, and he could hear in the distance a clattering of stove-lids and the rattle of cooking utensils. In a minute the door opened, and he was invited in.

He went through the sitting-room into the kitchen in the rear. There on a table was a kerosene-lamp, and in the stove he heard a fire crackling.

Wonder of wonders—there was a young woman just handing a big steak into a broiler, and a moment later she was peeling some boiled potatoes and cutting them up into slices.

"How did you ever find me?" she asked. "And did you think I really wanted you to take all that trouble to bring the water-bag to me?"

"Wouldn't any man do it?" he asked at last, as he recovered his breath. But he turned red under his dark tan as he added hastily: "It just happened so—I was coming to Thirsty Creek country—I didn't really know you'd be here!"

"And you're so honest you wouldn't have me believe you rode six or eight hundred miles to return a six-bit water-bag?" she inquired.

"A six-bit water-bag?" he repeated. "It saved my life!"

"Oh!" She turned from him, deeply moved. "I wondered—"

"I didn't know you-all were here!" he said desperately, to get something off his mind. "The last I heard, this ranch wa'n't occupied. I was just—just stopping in!"

"I heard you come down to the spring

brook," she explained, "and I heard you coming—I couldn't know—then—that it was a friend. But I'm so glad you did come—I've only just got settled down. I've been wondering—you seem to be a cow-man?"

"Yes—a cow-man."

"Free—I mean, could I get you to organize an outfit here? I must have a foreman immediately, and we must get together some men—good men, who know cattle—brands—and everything! You see—I—you're not—you haven't any connections in this part of the country?"

"Yes, I'm free." He stopped short, as his teeth clicked involuntarily. "I'm free—and I—I'd like a job."

"I know you're competent—the looks of you!" she smiled. "You're now my foreman—seventy a month and found. That all right?"

"Foreman?" he repeated slowly. "It seems like—course, I'll do it!"

"And you'll—you'll fight for me?" she blazed at him as her feelings surged.

"Lady!"—he started to his feet with sudden emotion. "Is that all yo' ask—fight?"

They both laughed at the sudden seriousness of the moment, and the laugh was merry.

Janie left the man in no doubt as to what she required:

"I want you to get good men—hard men—men who'll fight! You know where we are, and what the country around here is. I don't care who the men are—but, if you know about it, we've got to fight out here to hold our own. I—I'm not even sure what is our own. Of course—if you'd rather not—"

"I'd rather!" he said. "And you ain't so particular about your outfit? That suits—from the foreman down, that suits!"

She looked at him, as she caught the undertone, the double meaning, or rather the full-of-meaning words. She brought on the hot fried spuds and the dripping, broiled steak. She poured a big earthenware cup full of black coffee, and moved up the sugar-bowl and cream-pitcher. She took down a loaf of bread wrapped in waxed paper, and uncovered the butter-dish. She sat down herself, and having cut several slices of bread, spread one of them with apple butter, and sipped her own cup of coffee.

"My name is Janie Frete," she suggested, at a sudden thought.

"Mine's—mine's—" He hesitated, embarrassed. In a minute he said: "My name's Tarcass."

"I don't want you to think anything," she said slowly and choosing her words. "But I want to tell you—they have a new foreman over at the White Face Cattle Company ranch. He's just come in. His name is Bleak Grisp. I happened to hear about him over at Racklack court, when I went out to stock up here."

"Bleak Grisp?" the man repeated, wetting his lips. "I—we'll be meeting up—course."

"Not a bit of doubt of it," she nodded. "We'll all be meeting up. You see—our brand here is the horned-A and lopped left ear. But there isn't an animal left to the ranch—not one!"

"Eh—what?"

"I don't know how many more than a thousand head have disappeared," she said. "Irving Trenal owned those cattle. If Bleak knows of any, or finds any, naturally—"

"But—but—" The man choked over his bread. "I—you see—"

"Just a moment." Janie leaned over the table. "You'll take a chance for me? I need you—I like your gait! Bleak don't want to go back to Utah himself!" she added pointedly.

"Why—what—oh!"

"Exactly," Janie smiled, as she could smile when gaining a difficult point. "Asra Clement's widow was only two jumps behind him when he crossed the State line. *That's* what I heard."

"That's dif'rent!" the man sighed with relief. "I'll stay. I know about some of that, myself. You see—"

"Sh!" Janie warned. "I really mustn't know too much of what isn't any of my business. My business is awfully engaging itself—Tarcass."

"Yes'm," Tarcass grinned.

"You can drive a car?"

"Yes."

"Then go out to-morrow and round up some men—"

"If you don't mind—I beg pardon—but I'll—I'll—"

"Oh—certainly! Leave it to you."

"I'll rope a hoss in the morning and—"

"There isn't a horse left on the place," she interrupted him. "All we've got is the automobile and a barrel of gasoline."

"Then I'll walk," he said. "In the morning I'll walk."

"But I hate to have—"

"It's all right; I'd crawl, Miss Frete—you bet I would! I'd crawl if I had to!"

He looked at her with the kind of an expression that always lowered Janie's gaze. Then he sprang to his feet, despite the aches and pains in his tired body, and on the porch, catching up his saddle-blanket, walked out with it over his arm.

"Here's the flash," she said. "You'll find the bunk-house all ready."

"I'd sleep in the corral," he called back, "if it wasn't. My hoss is in the alfalfa plumb wore out."

"Leave him there!" she said, and went over to the bunk-house, which was another stone building, laid up with mortar, and had a good floor, a good roof, and iron cots with springs and mattresses on them.

He had come to sleep in the bungalow, but he was glad now to sleep in that bunk-house—new blankets and a stove, with some gnarled cedar chunks beside it, told him that Janie Frete had already planned the work ahead, as well as prepared for the coming of the men—men who would fight for her!

"I know them boys!" he grinned to himself as he sank upon a bunk mattress and into sleep on the instant.

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.

SUCCESS

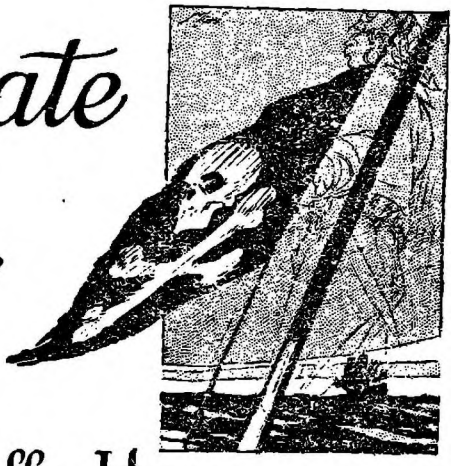
BY NAN TERRELL REED

"WHAT is Success?" I asked,
The artist, as he sat before
An easel on a barren floor.
"It is a dream they've dreamed of old;
It is a fairy story told
Of rainbows, and a pot of gold
Awaiting at the end."

"What is Success?" I asked
The busy man who never smiled
At all the riches 'round him piled.
"It is the building of a tower;
It is sometimes a single hour
When man is conscious of the power
He holds o'er other men."

"What is Success?" I asked
The man whose entire life had been
A service to his friends and kin.
"It is to lessen grief and stress;
It is perhaps just kindliness;
It's love, and human things, I guess,
That somehow bring Success."

Teach: Pirate De Luxe



by C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne

HERE is the first of a series of sea stories by a most distinguished and popular English writer—C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne, creator of the famous "Captain Kettle," and author of numerous salt-water tales of the finest sort. This series, which deals with the astounding adventures of a great-great-grandson of the famous pirate "Blackbeard," will be a feature of our warm-weather numbers. Exciting, whimsical, full of the *feel* of the sea, told with the grace and charm of a master fictionist, they are the most fascinating and agreeable of summer reading. Each story is complete in itself, but to get the greatest possible enjoyment from the adventures of "Teach: Pirate De Luxe," you should start with the first story and not miss a single one.

I—KING ERNESTINO'S SPOONS

EVEN in these so-called democratic days the affairs of King Ernestino are a ticklish subject to write about. His majesty is, I suppose, openly related to every current or late reigning family in Europe, and, according to scandal, connected with many tribal headmen from Asia who can and do pull strings. So not being anxious for a clout on the head from that hidden hand which all over the globe protects Hun interests, I am going to "go canny," and like the collier, pull about one-half of my available weight.

That is one reason why I call the potentate "Ernestino" since it is not his name, and describe as "spoons" articles of considerable higher value.

But there is no camouflage about Teach. Teach is Captain Edward Teach all the time. No others are genuine.

When the censor first let his name be published, the papers, in view of the always-dreaded libel action, spoke of him for exactly one week as the "alleged pirate." After that they dropped their nervousness and labelled him *Pirate*, pure and simple, with all the gusto of heavy leaded block type.

Teach biographies abounded. They traced the descent of Captain Teach back to his great-great-grandfather, also an Edward Teach, who, under the *nom de guerre* of Blackbeard, had a flourishing practise in the early seventeen-hundreds among the West Indies and off the coasts of the Carolinas, and who came to a somewhat premature end in the year eighteen of that century.

They gritted the teeth of the members of Brown's Club in St. James's Street, S. W.,

and the Porterhouse Club of New York, by putting on record the fact that Captain Teach was a member of both those exclusive institutions. But their inaccuracies about the connection of Captain Teach with the Dale Steamship Line irritated Sir Joseph Dale, K. B. E., the managing owner of that company into print. As his letter does not appear to have gone beyond the Liverpool paper in which it was originally published, it seems good to repeat it (by permission) in this record.

"Sir," began the knight, and one could almost feel the stenographer's pencil tremble at his dictation—

SIR:

In view of the scurrilous libels poured forth from practically every section of the press except your own anent the connection between the man Teach and my firm, I deem it well to give you the true facts.

The fellow came into our service exactly eight months ago, being engaged at Bahia by cable as master of our S. S. Littondale, 1700 tons, vice late master died of fever, we having no other officers unfortunately out there with full ticket. He did voyage home to Liverpool under schedule time on satisfactory coal consumption. We had no complaints against him. He earned bonus. Personally I did not like him, but could find no possible grounds for firing, and so let him sign on for next voyage.

He did well for my firm up ~~to~~ the time of the trouble; I will say that. But it appears he was in the hands of a money lender in Jermyn Street, a thing we always warn our officers against (see confidential circular enclosed). It was that which brought about his deplorable downfall, not drink, the curse of so many.

His embezzlement of money, by which my firm suffered so heavily (but has not prosecuted) was entirely due to the fact that owing to the war we are staffed now with fools of girls who spend their time manicuring instead of attending to masters' accounts. With my old office staff he would not have got away with one tenth as much. With regard to the impudent forgeries by which he extracted the four much-talked-about 6-inch guns and ammunition from the naval stores, that is the navy's lookout. A child wouldn't have been taken in by those forgeries. The navy was. I say no more.

I can only deplore the manner in which he carried off Miss Mary Arncliffe, a lady for whom I have the highest regard, as her father, Mr. Wm. Arncliffe, of Arncliffe's Bent-wood Works, is well known to me. This lady it appears is the promised wife of our Mr. James Buckden, chief officer of our S. S. Littondale, and was on board seeing him off. The man Teach sent our Mr. Buckden ashore with a bogus errand, and put to sea with Miss Arncliffe still on board.

As to our "connivance," so-called, in the whole outrage, I should like to point out it looks like our having a total loss over our S. S. Littondale and claims on cargo, as underwriters so far have refused to pay. But as legal proceedings are pending I had better say no more, and so remain,

Yrs etc.

JOSEPH DALE K. B. E.
Mng. Owner,
Dale S. S. Co. Ltd.

Sir Joseph's literary style may be doubtful in its grammar, but it can be commended at least for its vigor. He did not like Captain Edward Teach, in fact never had liked him. There are no bones about that. And by a singular coincidence no shipowners do seem to have been fond of Captain Teach.

They had no fault to find with his professional attainments; they all admit he was a brilliant seaman, and, up to the time of the debacle, exactly honest; but they were always relieved when there was a chance of moving him out of their ships, and sending him along with flaming testimonials to the opposition line.

It was a parallel case, one supposes, to that of the late Dr. Fell. The Royal Naval Reserve seem to have had identical qualms.

Like all smart young mercantile marine officers, Teach wished to write R. N. R. after his name. But somehow the scheme failed. He was dismissed for no fault. Merely the Naval Reserve got too hot to hold him and—let me see—I think he "resigned."

But in Brown's Club in London and the Beefsteak in New York, any member, if you ask him quietly, will tell you the man was extremely popular. He was generous but never lavish; he was undeniably clubbable; he was traveled, a good talker, modest, could choose a good dinner, and could carry his liquor like a gentleman—which he undoubtedly was. In fact, that much abused word "gentleman" always seemed to be used in conjunction with his name. "Teach is an infernal pirate," one old member of his St. James's Street Club admitted to me, "and I hope to hear he's hanged. But he was a gentleman all the time he was inside these doors. I wish Brown's had

more of 'em. We've too many of the other sort."

Women, too, liked him, probably because of his looks. He was a big upstanding six-foot man of thirty, always in the pink of condition, and immensely powerful. He weighed just upon thirteen stone and had not an ounce of fat on him anywhere.

He had blue black hair and a very dark olive complexion, and personally I think he made a mistake in being clean-shaved, as his chin and jowl were always distinctly dusky. But as I say, women liked him.

He, however, had very little truck with them. He was distinctly a man's man. That is, until he met Mary Arncliffe. And even as regards her—

However that will wait.

One further letter to the newsparers from the acid pen of Sir Joseph Dale should be read here. Wrote that sore knight:

SIR:

We have traced certain of the sums of money embezzled by the man Teach from this office. He handed them across to a certain "Guild of Sailors' Mothers" in which he is interested, and which it appears he founded. We are pleased to record that some of the money has been recovered by us, but not all, some having been spent by the Mothers, who have no assets. We understand that a larger part of the sum extracted from the Jermyn Street money lender went to the same source. We need hardly point out that even philanthrophy, so-called, is not the least excuse for dishonesty in a shipmaster's accounts.

Rightly or wrongly, the press declined to publish this effusion, and how a copy came into my hand, I decline to state. But as all sides of Teach's twisted character ought to be balanced up before one can get a clear conception of the man, this small facet cannot be omitted.

So I ask you to look at him now on the bridge of his S. S. Littondale dodging his way down the Mersey during the last days of the war. His cargo was coal from South Wales.

Now Liverpool ships most things, but it is not a coal port. South Welsh coal for export to Central America would have been put aboard in the ordinary way under the shoots at Newport or Cardiff. But the ways of the War Lords were inscrutable. They seemed to possess a vast and comprehensive ignorance on all known subjects. And so, in view of the shortage of railroad wagons, they decreed that the Littondale load should be hauled from the Rhondda Valley and shipped at Liverpool. *Quod erat faciendum.*

But it was the fly in Captain Edward Teach's otherwise perfect ointment of content from the very start. It looked so infernally improbable.

Trouble first arrived out of a patch of gray mist off Holyhead in the shape of a converted tug which called herself an examination ship. She, armed to the teeth with one maxim which was trained doggedly on the Littondale's bridge, bustled up and made the usual curt inquiries.

"Littondale, Teach, master, out of Liverpool for Coatzacoalcos," came the brisk answer.

"What's your cargo?"

"Coal."

"What sort?"

"Welsh steam."

"What, South Wales coal out of Liverpool? The devil! Here, you. Bring up. I'm coming aboard. And don't forget my guns will clean your decks in two ticks if you show awkward."

The examining officer came and went, impressed but not satisfied. All papers were in exact order. The guns on poop and forecastle were six-inch instead of the usual four, but Teach with a wink explained that his office had a pull.

The other four guns that he had wangled out of the naval authorities were carefully out of sight under a layer of innocent-looking coal. (The examination officer had hatches removed, and saw the coal himself.) There was nothing more to be said. So the officer went back to his boat, curtly refusing the drink which his throat hankered for.

This tug presumably wirelessed her tidings over the Irish Sea, as the Littondale was, for reasons best known to the authorities, proceeding without convoy as far as Queenstown. M. L.'s, a converted yacht, a couple of smoky destroyers, and yet more M. L.'s narrowly inspected her through binoculars during her passage across, but none of them spoke her, and, what was more to the point none of them ordered him to stop.

But the four extra guns stayed hid under their shroud of coal, and Miss Mary Arncliffe still remained in extreme discomfort in a damp and grimy compartment of the double bottom.

Also the plump William Pickles, late petty officer, R. N., and one-time prize gun-layer of the Mediterranean Fleet, wore a face disguised with black dust and trimmed coal in a bunker. William was singularly anxious to avoid meeting old naval comrades. He had fulfilled with such completeness the old nautical rule which ordains that a sailor should have a wife in every port, that the day the Littondale sailed, civil law had stretched out unpleasant fingers in his direction.

It seemed that three of the wives had foregathered and compared notes — the nasty cats. So he had unostentatiously exchanged his majesty's service for that of Captain Teach, but was bashful about advertising the fact. Distinguished men often have their shynesses.

The convoy, painted in freakish camouflage, formed up in the sheltered waters of Queenstown Harbor, and shipmasters were given sheaves of instructions. The name of King Ernestino was being bandied about, though there was nothing in the official orders about him.

Captain Teach wanted to know more on the matter, but had a delicacy about putting direct inquiries, because of that wretched coal, he felt that naval eyes boring through him from waistcoat buttons to backbone.

The eyes of these officers fairly snapped with suspicion. But Captain Teach never lost countenance. He remained the cheerful competent shipmaster through it all, in spite of those extra guns and shells under the coal, and the girl behind the manhole door, and the bigamous deserter in his bunker. Only this big black-browed man was beginning to chafe badly at the irritating delays. He had an appointment off one of the Canary islands which would not keep.

One weakness did he permit himself. He tossed a half-penny with himself—heads he would go and look at Miss Arncliffe; tails he would let her stay on where she was. The coin fell heads.

To the officer on watch in the engine-room he gave a curt "Clear out of here," and the pirate engineer, a dull-eyed man of sixty, clumped up the steel ladders and disappeared. Then Teach unnutted bolts, and swung away a manhole door.

"Phui!" said a girl's voice from the dark interior. "That fresh air tastes good. It's horribly stuffy in here. You should see to it. And knobbly. I've finished both siphons of lemonade, but one of the tins of sardines you left was bad. You ought to complain to your grocer."

"I'll attend to that," said Teach. "Would you like to have further supplies inside that cubby-hole, or would you prefer to come out?"

"I suppose there are conditions attached to coming out?"

"There are. I want your parole that you will do exactly as you are told, and not interfere with what is going on in any way whatever."

"And what guarantee have I that you will treat me properly if I do promise?"

"None," said Teach dryly.

"I suppose that now you are practically a pirate?"

"That's a delicate thing to admit in Queenstown Harbor with about a quarter of the British Fleet buzzing round and asking impertinent questions, but I suppose the word pirate does define my present branch of the profession. So you will clearly understand that if you do not behave yourself most exactly, you will be knocked on the head at once or sooner."

"That is quite clear, thank you, Captain Teach, and as I have no possible other choice, I give you the parole you ask for—during one week. By the end of that I hope you will set me ashore. This place is horribly cramping and smelly. And I think there are rats. Quick!"

Teach lent a hand, and the girl squeezed out through the narrow manhole door. Her W. A. A. C. uniform was streaked with gamboge iron-rust, and so was her face. Her bobbed hair was clotted with it. Her trim shoes and shapely ankles were rust smeared as far as one could see. She swayed when Teach had plucked her to her feet.

An hour later he came to see her in a dark cubby-hole of a storeroom which had been fitted with a bunk, a wash-basin and a hair-brush. He carried a tray of food and a teapot.

"It beats conjuring," he said, "the way you women can prink yourselves up out of nothing. Here's some grub. I can't stay. Those fussy blighters on the escort may want me on deck any moment."

"You might bring me a novel or something to read."

He looked at her admiringly. "You're a cool one. But I'm afraid there's not such a human thing on board. D'ye care for plays by any chance?"

"Rather keen on them."

"Good." He pulled a typed manuscript from his pocket. "Here is a thing I came across the other day. You might tell me what you think of it."

The convoy was a mixed one of ships making for many ports, and the Littondale's orders were to keep with it up to a point in the middle of the Bay of Biscay. From there she was to strike west to her South Mexican port.

She carried out this programme with exactness, received her signal to part; shifted helm; and steamed west at the best of her thirteen knots. For a day she held that course, and Teach was just on the point of altering it for one more conformable with his immediate needs when smoke blotted the horizon dead astern. Captain Teach bit back his orders and watched an oil-fired destroyer slice up from the direction of Europe at thirty knots.

"And now what do you want?" he mused. "Still got that Liverpool—South Welsh coal for Coatzacoalcos on your chest, or has some new bug bit you?"

But the destroyer did not open any conversation. She merely circled round the little tramp at outrageous speed, glared at her through prismatic binoculars, and made off in the direction from which she had come.

"So that's that," said Captain Teach, and proceeded to make his southing.

Now some time previous to all these happenings H. M. King Ernestino had received a very unmistakable notice to quit his throne, not only from the allied powers, but also from a tidy majority of his own faithful subjects.

He sailed from his country's shores in a good deal of a hurry, and told Swiss newspapers that he had left his heart behind there. That may possibly be so. But what gave him considerably more mental worry was the plain fact that he had left also a very warm sum in bullion and American bearer bonds, lacking which he saw certain prospects of spending a very hardup old age.

The mere index of King Ernestino's faults would fill several pages; but some of his talents shone; and conspicuous among these stood out his knack for subterranean diplomacy. Men who know will tell you that there is not a crookeder old rogue in Europe or one more competent in covering his shifty tracks. So he summoned physicians, who assured the Swiss press that their royal guest was moribund, retired to a dying bed, and got very busy.

The generous details of who was bought, and who sold who, are beyond the scope of this memoir, but the main fact juts out that the goods were ferried in smelly fishing-boats under the noses of a very inquisitive British patrol, and transferred (at sea under cover of night) to a ramshackle old steamboat which the patrol the aforesaid had satisfied itself very completely carried no other cargo beyond currants and lead ore.

They were carried down the Mediterranean in this venerable craft at a steady six knots when her engines were in order, and the navy, which discovered too late what had slipped through, made sure that their destination was Spain.

However, King Ernestino felt that the trouble about Spain was not her dubious neutrality, but her frank dishonesty, about which there was no doubt whatever. So off Iviça in the Balearics transfer was once more made, this time to a high-pooped Genovese timber barque (which was not entirely manned by mariners from Genoa), and then, taking their several ways, the pair of vessels made for the gut of Gibraltar.

Here the vigilant navy went through that

ancient steamer with the finest mesh in their repertory, and, of course, found nothing that interested them. The clumsy old barque, looking like an Armada ship, blew through into the Atlantic without being even sniffed at.

All of these naval maneuvers occupied, as you will rightly observe, much time, and in places they leaked. How Captain Edward Teach smelt out one of these leaks I do not pretend to understand, but the fact remains that he got hold of information that struck him as valuable, and to realize on it he stole the S. S. Littondale, and some of my country's artillery and ammunition, and kidnapped Miss Mary Arncliffe, W. A. A. C., and took them not to fever-ridden Coatzacoalcos with its concrete wharves and electric cranes, but to the charming old-world isle of Graciosa, which as you will remember lies just north of Lanzerote in the Canaries. (The light is on Alegranza, which is just north again. So now you will know it.)

There is a snug little harbor between Isla Graciosa and Lanzerote, with good holding ground (6-17 f. s. and small shells. Sheltered except from S. W. No fresh water), and at one time the Isla held a baccalhao factory. But nothing now remains of this except some weathered lumber and the remains of the smell, which even the trade, that snores unceasingly over these scraps of land, is powerless to sweep away. It is powerful stuff, that Canary dried fish, and will probably give you leprosy if you should by any chance indulge your taste in it too far.

The high-quartered Genovese barque creaked into the anchorage, disrobed herself with noise and skill, rounded up, dropped a wooden-stocked relic, and rode to it at the end of thirty fathoms of rust-scaled chain. Her crew sat round and scratched themselves, festooned the sea-bleached rigging with a rainbow of washing, and awaited further orders.

For a week they wrangled, and basked, and perfumed the tradewind with garlic, and then one morning, just on the tail of dawn, the anchor-watch roused them with the news that two steamers were approaching the harbor.

Now one steamer they were expecting. Two were embarrassing. After the manner of Eastern Europe they all talked at once and gesticulated even more graphically. Some of them even acted.

A few ran aloft to loose top-sails. A gang of them began to pump at the clumsy windlass and actually shortened in cable by six fathoms before they thought of something else. But on the whole they did nothing efficient except to sneak away below, one by one, to put on the best clothes they could find, and to loot anything available.

In the mean while the two steamers converged toward the entrance of the harbor. The one coming up from the southward, was a well-decked tramp of some three thousand tons which called herself the Bolshevette and flew a British red ensign, and blatantly exhibited a considerable armament.

The other, which was heading down from the norrard, was half her size. But she was Captain Teach's Littondale, and although newly built deck-houses hid most of her armament, the armament was undeniably there, and ex-P. O. Wm. Pickles had seen to it that his gun-crews were thoroughly efficient.

Captain Teach had a fine repertory of bunting in his flag locker, but he showed nothing till the Bolshevette fired her first shell — which went over her. Then he broke out the British naval white ensign (to which of course he had no right whatever), whistled down the sides of his deck-houses, which fell with a prompt clang, and six 6-inch shells hurtled back in reply.

It is hard to get shipping lists to-day, and probably that is why I have failed to discover the Bolshevette on any registry. I do not know who she was (though I may have a sharp suspicion), but I have got to put on record that she showed a gallant fight. But the Littondale out-shot her. Also outmaneuvered her.

I have said already that Teach was a wonderful seaman from the mercantile point of view. But it appeared he had an instinctive genius for the naval side also. He had sandbagged his upper bridge and his gun positions with coal, and he was not

in the least squeamish about casualities among his crew.

"The fewer there are to share, the more there is to divide," is a well known axiom of all pirates. But he respected the tender skin of the 1,700-ton Littondale, and always anticipated his enemy's move the instant before it was made.

After the habit of modern naval battles, the whole action was over and settled inside eight minutes. "Never mind her guns: lay your sights on her boilers," was Mr. Wm. Pickles's standing order, and his crews took their punishment grimly, and carried out instructions.

The action begun at full range, but Teach's motto was *toujours l'audace,* and he closed at the best of his speed.

This kept him more or less end on, and because the bigger steamer, after the first bout, headed in for the shelter of the land, she made a fine target. As I say, the whole affair was over in very quick time.

Then the Littondale was steamed inside the harbor, and after taking from the Genevese barque those things which she had come for, dealt with her also very thoroughly. After that, and not before, the white ensign was struck and in its place a grim skull and crossbones on a black ground fluttered and snapped in the trade. The flag was punctiliously saluted by all hands, and thereafter success was drunk to it in moderate tots of whisky.

It was an asinine thing to do, of course, because there is a cable to the outer world from Lanzerote, and even a Canary Spaniard will stir himself enough to send out news occasionally. The only reason I can give for it was Teach's colossal vanity—and perhaps some throw-back taste from his ancestor, Captain Edward Teach the First, at the time he sailed the seas as Blackbeard.

However, there it was, and Mary Arncliffe coming out on deck looked at the gristly flag, laughed, and presented it with a little bow.

"All that noise," said she, "to set on fire one little old wooden ship—and think of the size of this."

"If you'd been up here," said Teach shortly, "you'd have seen me sink a big steamer three times the size of the Littondale."

"Many drowned?"

He shrugged. "The lot I suppose. I didn't wait to see. The rum thing is I don't know what the boat was. She wasn't British, anyway, as she claimed to be.

"She wasn't on the programme. But she choose to interfere, and she got it in the neck. That old duck that's smoking there was my meat. I guess we've raked £300,000 out of her."

"Ernestino's?"

"I expect he thought so."

An hour later they met again. On the well-deck below, the crew were roaring songs and drinking wine looted from the Genovese—though be it well noted, none of these twentieth century pirates were in the least drunk. On the bridge stood Captain Teach, big, dark, and handsome, in the dandified rig of sea evening kit as worn by officers in the tropics.

He looked over Mary Arncliffe as she came up from below, and nodded his head sourly:

"The afterguard dress for dinner on this ship."

"You big black-haired bully," retorted the girl with a half-smile, "my service uniform is evening dress. Hand me a deck-chair at once.

"I have read through your friend's play, by the way. It's the most piffling rubbish I ever put eyes on."

"Ah," said Teach, "I didn't think it was up to much myself." But though he spoke lightly enough, he flushed through his sallow skin.

"Got him," said the girl to herself. "I knew he wrote it, the murderous brute. Oh, my God! Help me to keep a brave face, and never let him guess that I am twittering with fright.

"You ought to have gold rings in your ears," she added aloud, "to make the picture of the pirate chief complete. And now you have got King Ernestino's loot, what are you going to do with it? Have you thought that out, Captain Teach?"

But Teach was thinking of a certain gild of sailors' mothers which would have benefited if that play had been a success.

On the Face of the Waters

by George Ethelbert Walsh

CHAPTER XIII.

AN AMBASSADOR FROM BELOW.

ALLISTER did not breath easily until he had reached the upper deck and found it as deserted as when he left it. Checking his headlong flight then, and calming the unruly throbbing of his heart, he walked slowly and deliberately the rest of the way to his stateroom. He even paused on the way to glance seaward as if he were concerned in nothing more important than the long lift of the ocean's undulating surface.

His knuckles ached from the impact of the blow on the point of the man's chin, and that they were smeared with blood he knew from the moisture collected on them. He was anxious to get back to his room to bathe and cleanse them, but not so anxious as to excite suspicion by any undue haste.

He was still alert for any sounds below to indicate excitement. If the splash of the body in the water had attracted anybody's attention, the alarm would have been given before this. He breathed a sigh of satisfaction as the minutes sped on and no noise came from below.

Then he walked leisurely the rest of the way. At the entrance he stood a moment before opening the door. Suddenly as it swung open he was conscious of something crossing the threshold ahead of him, leaping past him so that the body brushed his legs. In a moment he was on the alert for this new and unexpected danger. Somebody else was in the room with him.

"Me velly sorry, cap'n," whispered Si's welcome voice, "but me come's soon as Miss Jane go."

"Si," gasped Allister, closing the door softly, and grasping in the dark for the Chinese cook, "how'd you get here?"

"Me crawl like turtle—crawl all the way. It velly slow work. Miss Jane not like it; she velly particular; she say they kill me if I come."

"So they would, Si. It's very dangerous; but now you're here, I'm glad to see you."

Without a light in the stateroom, and with the shutters closed, they were safe from prowlers, and Allister sighed with relief that the thick partition of the stateroom hid them from view.

"Why did you risk your life to come here, Si?" he added.

"Me bring message from Mr. Sutton."

"You've seen Billy?" eagerly. "How'd you see him?"

"Me crawl down there like me crawl up here. Mr. Sutton velly glad to see me."

"I'll bet he was! How is Billy?"

"He velly much mad, and him going to fight, and take the ship. He say he kill pirates and chuck 'em in the sea for shark's food."

Allister chuckled, for he could imagine the unrestrained indignation of Sutton, confined so long below decks.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for May 8.

"What's he going to fight with?" Allister asked after a pause. "Has he any weapons?"

"Him has velly big iron stick—big enough to kill man—break his head with one blow."

"That would be a poor weapon against guns, Si. If that's all he's armed with you must tell him to wait. Have any of the stoke-hole passengers guns?"

"Mebbe not, but they velly mad. They kill if they get a chance. Mr. Sutton ask me to use skillet and hot water when he come up to fight. Me not afraid, but mebbe it not wise, cap'n. Miss Jane think mebbe not."

"Miss Jane's right," Allister broke in. "We wouldn't stand a chance against their weapons. They'd shoot us down like dogs. No, Billy mustn't start a riot until we're all ready. Can you get that message to him, Si?"

"Me try; me go once, me go again."

Allister was silent a few moments, thinking hard. Unless some definite plan was made for cooperation, there was danger of any incipient uprising proving disastrous. Now that he had won the confidence of Corrigan, he could not afford to have it shattered without a certainty of success of any effort he made to get possession of the steamer. There had been forming in his mind a vague plan. Perhaps it would succeed, and perhaps it wouldn't. But in the mean time it was certain that Billy had to be kept quiet until he was ready.

"Si," he said finally, "I want you to tell Sutton that I have a plan, and that he must not interfere with it. He must wait until I'm ready. It may be in a few days; it may be longer. But whenever it is time to put it into execution, he must be prepared to lead his force up from the hold to join in the battle."

"He velly anxious to do it now."

"Yes, but it isn't time now."

"When he know it's time?"

Allister pondered a moment in silence. Then his face brightened. "When I give five blasts on the whistle," he replied. "That will be the signal for him to come up, and not before. You will know the signal, too, Si, and you can attack in the rear with your skillet and hot water."

"And Miss Jane, she got little pop-gun. She fight, too," grinned the Chinaman.

"No, I wish she'd keep out of it," frowned Allister. "It's a man's fight, and not a woman's."

"She velly mad, cap'n, and she fight velly much if she get chance. Me tell her not, but she shrug pretty shoulders, and say American woman fight just as well as men."

"Yes, they can and will. I don't doubt that, especially Miss Jane. But I wish she'd keep out of it."

"Me tell her what you say."

"I don't know that it will do any good," frowned Allister. "Perhaps it will make her do the opposite."

"Me tell her."

"All right—tell her, and warn her to keep out of danger. Let her understand that nothing is to be done until she hears five blasts of the whistle. That will be the call to arms."

"Me be ready," placidly replied the Chinaman.

Allister felt relieved, for with a general signal understood between them there was less likelihood of a false move. Besides, as he would give the signal, the situation would be in his hands and not in Sutton's, who was inclined to be rash and bull-headed.

"If there was only some way of releasing Dr. Shipman from the hospital he could help," he murmured.

"Me get word to him through Miss Jane," interrupted Si. "She go every day to carry food for sick ones."

"Then tell her, and if she goes in the forward cabin where the prisoners are held let her pass the word on to them. Does she go there?"

"No," grinned Si, "but me know how to do that. Me take food to prisoners."

"You do? Then you can tell me whether they're in irons. Are they tied up?"

"They velly mad, too," replied Si slowly, "but they not show it like Mr. Sutton. They keep quiet, and they not tied up. They good—so good they walk around and smoke."

"But the cabin's locked and guarded?"

"Me knock guard on head with skillet, cap'n," replied the cook quite calmly. "Me do it easy; he no big man. Then me crawl through window an' open door."

Allister stared blankly through the darkness at the dried-up, grinning face, but he had no doubt that Si could and would do it if necessary.

"It would be dangerous, Si," he murmured in genuine admiration for the Oriental.

"Alle samee, me do it. If guard crack Si on the head first, Chinaman die. If me crack first, he die."

Allister reached out and grasped a hand. It was small and weasoned, cold and clammy, but it was the hand of a loyal friend who would risk his life in a good cause.

"Si, if we ever get out of this I'll remember you. So will Miss Jane, and—"

"Miss Jane fine woman. She say she always keep me to cook for her."

"And you promised, I suppose?" smiled Allister. "That means you'll no longer cook for me."

The Oriental shrugged his shoulders and made a queer gesture with his two hands. "Me not so sure, cap'n; me cook for both, mebbe."

"What do you mean?" demanded Allister sharply, but Si with another shrug of the shoulders waived the question aside.

"Me go now," he said, rising. "Miss Jane soon be back. She not let me go. She be velly angry."

"Where's she gone?" queried Allister curiously.

"To take walk on deck; she velly nervous and troubled."

"All right. I think she'll be back before you return. I saw her on deck."

"Me hurry, then," added Si, making for the door.

"Remember the signal, Si," cautioned Allister. "Five blasts on the whistle. When you hear that get busy. Tell Billy and Miss Jane. They must not do anything until they hear it—no matter if it's several days or a week. Now, you understand?"

"Yes, cap'n, me understand. Good-by!"

Allister clasped his hand again for a moment, and then the little figure crawled out of the doorway, and was soon lost to view.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALLISTER INTERFERES.

IF the man Allister had flung overboard was missed, the matter got no further than Corrigan, who would be the last to worry much over the loss of a single member of his crew. Allister made certain the following day that it was neither Corby nor Beagles, for both of these worthies were on duty, and he concluded that it was an unknown sailor, who had run amuck, and in a moment of passion or drunkenness had attacked Jane.

He dismissed the matter from mind and soon forgot it under the strain of the moment. Si Lung's visit had put new heart in him, and he began laying plans for the day when the passengers might rise up and retake the ship.

These came near going by the board, dashing all his hopes, through an incident that occurred on the lower deck a few days later. The Princeps had just begun to enter the region of calm that hangs over the Sargasso Sea like some brooding shadow of death, a calm of sea and air that arouses the superstitious awe of sailors. Increasing masses of seaweed—the gulfweed swept up by tide and winds, and twisted into fantastic shapes and forms—daily floated past them, sometimes in small bunches or single stalks, and again in vast islands that looked like submerged land.

While watching these floating drifts from the port side, Allister suddenly caught sounds of a commotion below, echoes of laughter and hilarious shouts of merry-making. He paid no attention to them until, above the other confusing sounds, he heard the peculiar high falsetto voice of Si, a combination of wild jabbering in broken English and squeals of pain. Allister's figure straightened, and when the squeals continued, rising in volume and intensity, he clenched his hands and scowled.

He moved toward the head of the stairs. The noise came from the lower deck. Allister slipped down to the promenade deck,

and from the head of the stairs he could get a sweeping glimpse of the scene on the main deck.

A noisy group of the mutineers had formed a circle, with Si in the center of it. One man had the Chinaman by his pigtail, and every time he jerked it, swinging the cook around, a squeal of pain excited the spectators to laughter. Another sailor caught the unfortunate Chinaman and flung him clear across the circle, where he was received by kicks and blows. Then his brawny tormentor caught the pigtail again, and throwing Si on his back, began carrying him around the circle like a sack of wheat.

Allister's blood boiled to fever heat. All the crew, except those on guard, had joined the rioters, and no one was watching him. He gritted his teeth, and took a few steps down the stairs.

But a sudden interruption of the merry-making came from another quarter. Jane Worden burst through the circle, and slapped the brawny sailor sharply in the face, causing him to drop his hold on Si's hair. With an oath and animal snarl, the man raised a hand as if to strike her, but with Si crouching at her feet for protection, she faced the man unflinchingly.

The latter glared at her malignantly, and then a nasty leer came into his face. Instead of striking her, he reached out a hand and caught her by the arm. Allister could not hear his words, but he could see Jane struggling to break away, repeatedly slapping her tormentor in the face, who now good-naturedly smiled at each blow and tightened his hold. The others closed in to enjoy this new sort of fun.

Allister could no longer contain himself. Forgetting all else, he ran down the stairs, and reached the outer circle just as the burly brute was making an attempt to kiss her. Using both arms like the wings of a windmill, he fanned the men aside as if they had been made of straw until he reached the center.

Catching the right arm of the tormentor in a firm grip, he twisted it upward and backward, giving it a famous jiu-jitsu wrench that nearly dislocated it. A scream of pain escaped the sailor's lips as he dropped to his knees in agony, his arm and body almost paralyzed.

"The next time you want fun, take a man," Allister said in a steady voice.

He gave the arm a final twist that made the man's lips turn white with pain, and flung him to the deck. Surprise and amazement were depicted on the circle of faces, but Allister ignored them. They made way for him as he led Jane and Si out of the circle. Standing between them and the scowling mob, he smiled, showing his teeth as a dog might before attacking.

"Any more of you ready for a frolic?" he asked coolly. "If so, now's your opportunity."

The situation was dangerous. No one knew this better than Allister, for the crew were all armed, and in a battle with weapons the odds were all on their side. But Allister was figuring upon the dominance of mind over matter, and was prepared to hold them by the sheer force of will-power. They lacked leadership, and the first hand that strayed to a belt for a gun brought Allister around like a whip-lash.

"*You* wish to fight!" he snarled, taking a step toward the man, who immediately dropped his hand and slunk back among his mates.

Allister's eyes swept across the heads of the men and caught sight of Si and Jane backed up against the deck-house. Si was watching him with bulging eyes of admiration and faith, but Jane Worden was clutching in one hand what the Chinaman had designated as her little pop-gun, making no effort to conceal it in the folds of her dress or of her intention of using it if necessary.

Allister smiled happily, and turned his eyes back to the men; but that one glance had given him a pleasurable thrill. Jane had stood on guard, ready to risk everything for his defense. Had a sailor attempted to shoot him in the back, she would have plucked him first without any fear.

"Ho, here! What's the matter!" a booming voice broke in upon the tense silence, and Corby came running up from behind.

"What is it, mates?" he added. "What—"

He caught sight of Allister, and the sentence died on his lips. His ugly, scarred face turned red, and his hands clenched.

"What you doing down here?" he demanded, walking up to Allister, a menacing scowl on his face.

"Protecting Miss Jane from the insults of that rabble, Mr. Corby," was the cool retort.

"Now that it's over," he added, shrugging his shoulders, "I'll go back."

Before Corby could recover his wits or learn the cause of the commotion, Allister walked away and hurried back to his own deck. His last glance showed him that Jane and Si had vanished, and the crew were filling Corby's ears with their side of the story.

Realizing that the incident might cause trouble, and jeopardize his plans, Allister waited impatiently for the sequel. It came an hour later when Corrigan appeared on the upper deck, his hairy face and piglike eyes aflame with anger. Allister greeted him with a nod and smile.

"I told you to take orders from me," snarled the man, "an' they was to keep on this deck." His hands twitched as if anxious to enforce his will. "You go down there again an' I'll shoot you as I would a damn snake!"

"Your orders also were that the men should not interfere with Miss Jane, weren't they?" sneered Allister. "Then why not enforce them first?"

The man answered by a snarl that had no articulate expression, a violent rage possessing him.

After a moment of facial contortion, he added: "I'll have discipline or hell will break loose! Get that?"

"Did Mr. Corby report my side of the story?" was the cool question. "If not I'll tell it."

"I don't want to hear it! Shut up! You're stirring up mutiny among my own men, an' I won't have it. I'll put you in irons or chuck you overboard."

Allister laughed good-naturedly. "You could do that easily, I suppose, but you'd be biting your own nose off, Corrigan. Do you know where we are? We're on the edge of the Sargasso Sea, a thousand miles from any land. Do you think you could find your way home again without me? I'll make an even bet with you that you'd wallow around in the middle of the Atlantic until the coal was all burned up, and then —well, you know what would happen then"—shrugging his shoulders. "You'd either die of slow starvation, one after another, or fly at each other's throats. And the first, I imagine, to go, would be the man who had led the crew into this desolate region of the ocean. Half starved, desperate sailors have a short memory, and their friend to-day may be their enemy to-morrow."

"I'd shoot every living one of them first," growled Corrigan, but with lessened violence. Allister's words had gone home. He was necessary for the success of the expedition, and also for navigating the steamer back to some land.

Until then they had to endure him; but once land was sighted on the return trip, they could easily dispense with his services. Allister mused with good reason that, after that, his life wouldn't be worth the turn of a nickel. They would shoot him or throw him overboard without compunction.

CHAPTER XV.

AGAINST THE DISTANT HORIZON.

CORRIGAN was surly and suspicious again, and his keen eyes watched Allister furtively. Conscious that he was under close surveillance once more, with all the trust and confidence that he had gained lost in one brief half-hour, Burke Allister was tormented by the fear that the opportunity he had waited for might never come.

They were approaching the southern end of the Sargasso Sea. The drifting gulf weed steadily increased in density, and at times they plowed through vast floes of it, cutting the thick ropelike stalks into shreds with the blades of the propellers, and leaving a trail of clear, bubbling water behind that stretched for miles across the smooth seas.

The excitement caused by the gradual change in the scenery kept the crew in a

state of expectancy. Eyes were scanning the horizon in every direction to pick up some abandoned ship that had drifted into this desolate region of the ocean. They had been led to believe they would find scores, if not hundreds, of derelicts adrift, waiting for them to salvage the valuables they carried aboard, and their disappointment was unmistakable when they failed to see anything that looked like a ship.

It was a dreary and awe-inspiring scene. An optical illusion made the sea seem as smooth and oily as a mill-pond, the long swells never breaking into whitecaps, and with the ponderous growth of seaweed impeding their progress, the waves never seemed to move at all. The illusion was fascinating. It was as though the ocean's surface had been frozen, leaving it roughened and rumpled, with long, motionless ridges spreading for miles in all directions.

There was scarcely any wind, and what little did sweep across the desolate waste lacked the power to kick up even a mild sea. The masses of gulf weed fretted and swished against the sides of the steamer, grudgingly parting to permit her a passageway. A few sea petrels and wide-winged albatrosses, birds that could sleep on the waves and never miss the land, circled overhead or alighted on the ocean's surface to feed.

Time and again the gulfweed thickened in masses until they resembled floating islands. More than once the cry went forth that land was ahead, but beyond steering free from the denser growths, Allister paid no heed to them.

There was no land within a thousand miles of them. They were in mid-Atlantic, as far from shore or passing steamers as man could possibly get. And over the desolate waste a terrible brooding calm hovered, and affected the mind. The great stalks of trailing weed, with their branches tipped with air-bladders, seemed to have no end or root, as though the sea was bottomless or of fathomless depth. The men fished up ropes of them, as thick as the arm, olive-green, fleshy and pulpy, and tough as strands of hemp, and wove them into the cables the girth of the body.

Corrigan, Corby, and Beagles were on the upper deck, taking turns scanning the monotonous horizon. In the excitement of the moment they forgot their grudge against Allister. They talked together in low voices or asked Allister questions, assuming that he knew more of the Sargasso Sea than they.

Allister's knowledge was second-hand, gleaned from books and talks with old seamen, who had been in the sea or near the outer edges, and, truth to tell, he was nearly as interested as the others. It was a sight calculated to arouse the dullest mind from its lethargy. His disappointment in not sighting any derelicts was also nearly as keen as that of Corrigan's or Corby's. He had hoped Corrigan's theory was true, and they would run into a fleet of dead ships caught in the grip of the gulfweed.

His imagination took in the possibilities of being stranded in such a wild waste of sea where neither currents nor winds moved a ship. A sailing ship would be in a hopeless tangle once caught in the masses of gulfweed, and a steamer with a broken shaft or lost wheel might remain there for years before succor came. Starvation, panic, nameless fear, and eventually insanity would be the fate of the lost crew.

He shuddered at the thought. It was not entirely impossible for them to get embedded in the weeds to such an extent that escape might prove difficult if not impossible. He suddenly rang for reduced speed. Corrigan turned on him quickly.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Why you slowing down? We ain't there yet."

"We're far enough to take precautions," was the reply. "Plowing through this mass of weeds may cause a breakdown."

"How's that? What could happen?"

"Perhaps you don't know of the strain on the shaft and propellers. We might snap off a blade, or worse yet, break a shaft. We've got to go more cautiously."

Corrigan grudgingly admitted there was reason in this explanation, and permitted Allister to have his way. After that the Princeps moved more slowly, and the terrific pounding beneath the stern subsided somewhat. The great ropelike weeds wound and twisted in fantastic shapes around the shank of the shaft, and sometimes smoth-

ered the propellers so they slipped through the water without biting into it.

Allister grew more serious as they proceeded. He was more interested now in avoiding a breakdown than in discovering derelicts. He listened intently to the pounding of the engines and the interrupted churning of the wheels. And as they proceeded the masses of gulfweed increased in density and heaviness.

"Corrigan," he called finally, "it will be dangerous to attempt to cross the Sargasso. There's no blinking that fact. It may be done. It has been done, perhaps. But we're risking a good deal. We may become stranded here."

"What d'you want to do—turn around an' go back?" was the sneering retort.

"How far in do you want to go?"

"Far enough to find those lost ships."

"Suppose they're not here?"

"There ain't any supposing. They're here! They can't be anywhere else. And if we don't find 'em—"

"What?"

"We'll camp here until we do find 'em, if it takes ten years."

Allister smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"Ten years is a long time," he said, "even ten months, or ten weeks, in this lonely place. Do you think the crew would stand for it?"

"They'll stand for it as long as I tell 'em, an' after that they can go to hell!"

"Then you want me to keep going ahead?" queried Allister.

"Yes, until I tell you to stop!"

Beagles, who had been listening, shook his head and looked glum. He had never been very keen about the expedition. His idea had been to steal the Princeps, rob her, beach her on some lonely coast, and then get away while there was a chance.

"I don't see no ships here," he growled once. "I don't believe they are here, Corrigan."

"You don't believe nothing, Beagles, unless you see it," retorted Corrigan. "You ain't got the imagination of a child."

"I got common sense."

"You don't show it if you have," sneered the other. "If it hadn't been for me an' Corby you'd never come here. Ain't that so, Corby?"

"Sure; Beagles has a white liver."

"I got common sense," repeated the tall, lank one, spitting seaweed, "an' that tells me we're inviting trouble by going farther."

"What sort of trouble, Beagles?" asked Corrigan with terrible calmness.

"Well, for one thing, what the cap'n says. We're liable to lose a propeller or break something, an' then where are we? An' for another thing, the crew's getting tired of being disappointed. They want to put their eyes on some of them ships."

Corrigan glared hard at him. "How d'you know what the crew's thinking?" he asked in a menacing voice. "You been talking with 'em?"

Beagles flinched under the gaze and the implication of the words. "No, I ain't!" he blurted out quickly. "I don't need to talk with 'em. I can hear 'em, an' you can, too, if you go below."

"They got to have their little grumblings," remarked Corby, anxious to preserve peace. "Mebbe we'd better pass 'em out a little more liquor. That will keep 'em contented."

"Yes," nodded Corrigan. "Open up a few more bottles, Corby, an' tell 'em we'll soon be there. Say to 'em this is just the beginning of the sea, and we won't be there for—"

Allister, who had been listening with both ears to the wrangle, but keeping his eyes glued ahead, suddenly interrupted with a sharp grunt. The three turned and glared at him as if he had butted in to make matters worse. They looked as if they were ready to pounce upon the peace-maker and tear him to pieces.

"Corrigan," Allister said after a pause, "where 're your sea glasses? There's a blur ahead that looks—looks—"

"Where?" shouted the leader, grasping his binoculars and clapping them to his eyes.

"Over there—three points to the starboard," replied Allister, pointing.

There was a moment of tense silence. Those without glasses strained their eyes to pierce the hazy distance. A blur on the horizon that had attracted Allister's atten-

tion and might not be anything but a larger mass of gulfweed, was faintly visible to the naked eye. It was impossible to make it out without the aid of glasses.

"What is it?" demanded Corby, grasping the arm of Corrigan. "What you see?"

A faint smile had begun to spread on the bewhiskered face of the leader, a smile that spread and spread and then ended in a chuckle.

"I reckon," he drawled, removing the binoculars from his eyes, "you'll be convinced now, Beagles. Take a look."

Much to Corby's disgust and anger, he handed the glasses to Beagles instead of to him. With his hands trembling from excitement, the tall, lanky pessimist of the gang of pirates raised the binoculars to his eyes. A moment of suspense, and then with a little cry he dropped them.

"You got my goat, Corrigan," he exclaimed. "I guess I'll never disbelieve you again. That's a derelict, sure's we're standing here."

"Let me see!" growled Corby, snatching the glasses from him. He give a quick look, and then shouted: "Sure, it's a ship, an' a big one! We're there!"

He clapped Corrigan on the shoulder, and began dancing on his toes. "Maybe the cap'n would like to take a squint," remarked the leader, handing the binoculars to Allister.

A brief glimpse through the powerful sea glasses told the tale. A dismantled ship of some kind stood up gaunt and ghostlike against the distant horizon.

CHAPTER XVI.

FIVE SHARP BLASTS.

WHETHER the abandoned ship, stranded in the midst of the Sargasso, was a victim of German submarines, or an ordinary derelict of storm and sea that had drifted out of the paths of commerce and found its way into the middle of the Atlantic, no one aboard the Princeps could say; but there was no doubt in Corrigan's mind. Its mere presence there was verification of his theory, and if one, why not a dozen, a score, a hundred? While exulting over the discovery of their first ship, he cast his eyes continually around the horizon, expecting to find others.

"There ought to be more of 'em," he said. "I figger there's a couple of hundred caught somewhere in this sea."

"The Sargasso's a big sea," remarked Allister.

"Sure, but we'll explore every part of it."

Allister smiled and watched the blur ahead that was now beginning to take definite outline to the naked eye. When they no longer needed the glasses the cry of "Ship ahead!" rang out below, and the excitement became general. The derelict was a treasure-ship to the men, a promise of riches beyond imagination. The bait held before them silenced all murmurings of discontent. In anticipation of a series of lootings, they thronged the bow of the steamer or climbed to points of vantage for better lookouts.

Corrigan was the most excited of the three on the upper deck, but he kept it so well under control that he seemed the coolest. Allister, watching him through the corners of his eyes, saw the gleam in the piglike orbs and the constant twitching of his hands.

"Corby," he said finally, "me an' Beagles will each man a boat and take a peek inside the derelict. We'll leave the steamer in your charge."

Corby angrily dissented to this. He wanted to participate in the looting of the first ship they found, just as every man below was eager to have a hand in it.

"Huh! I ain't going to stay behind!" he retorted. "I got as much right to go as Beagles."

"Sure you have—if I say so!" snarled Corrigan, a dangerous gleam in his eyes. "You don't know anything about manning a boat, an' Beagles does. You'd likely upset it!"

"Then I'll go with you, Corrigan," half pleaded Corby. "I won't bother you. I'll pull an oar."

"We got to leave somebody in command of the steamer, Corby," the other said in a conciliatory voice, "an' we want

you. You stay this time, an' the next you'll be in command of a boat an' be the first to step aboard."

Corby protested still further, but Corrigan drew him aside and argued with him. Occasionally they glanced furtively at Allister and gesticulated with both hands. The result of the whispered conversation was that Corby consented to remain on the steamer, while Beagles and Corrigan each manned a small boat to the derelict.

Within two miles of the wreck the Princeps began to slacken her speed. Corrigan turned upon Allister, his face flushed with excitement. "You stopping again?" he demanded.

"No; it's the weeds. They're getting so thick the propellers are choked. We'd better stop, Corrigan. If we ever get caught in that mass ahead we'll be like a fly in a spider's web."

The abandoned ship seemed to be resting on an island, high and dry, so dense was the gulfweed accumulated around her. This fact convinced Corrigan that the danger of proceeding too close was real. The pounding and chugging of the wheels, as they churned and threshed the water, impressed him.

"If we lose a wheel or snap a shaft here," added Allister, "we won't go hunting for any more wrecks. We'll be a derelict ourselves."

Corrigan walked to the bridge and glanced down at the water on either side. The sea was choked with seaweeds. They were piled high in windrows where the Princeps had hurled them as she plowed through, and here and there streaks of clear water showed that the stalks reached down to an indefinite depth.

Then he looked ahead at the deserted ship, now about a mile distant. There were thin streams of open water, twisting and winding in serpentine fashion like creeks in a salt marsh. They were too narrow for the steamer to follow, but small boats could easily navigate them.

"All right!" he said, coming back to the wheelhouse. "Stop here. We can row the rest of the way."

Allister immediately gave the signal to the engine-room, and the Princeps came to a halt, stopping almost immediately, so great was the impediment to her speed. She did not drift, but lay almost as still as if berthed at her dock in New York.

Corrigan and Beagles hurriedly descended, leaving the upper deck in charge of Corby, who began pacing restlessly back and forth, watching the launching of the boats. Every member of the crew was anxious to go in one of the boats, and Corrigan had to enforce discipline by stern measures.

As it was, more men tumbled into them than necessary, and once in they refused to get out. Corrigan fumed and grumbled, but finally decided not to be too harsh at such a time. It was his own hour of triumph, and he did not want to spoil it with an altercation with his men.

Allister watched the launching of the two boats with as much interest as Corby. Smoking placidly, he leaned over the railing and counted the number in each little craft. They were certainly overmanned—twelve in one and fifteen in the other: twenty-seven in all, including Beagles and Corrigan.

When they rowed away from the steamer, following the lanes of open water, Corby walked aft and joined Allister. "The quickest way is in a straight line," he remarked. "Why don't they cut across the seaweed and not row around in circles?"

"They might get stuck or upset. Anyway, it would be hard rowing."

Together they watched the small boats wend their way in zigzag fashion, slowly approaching the derelict. The few members of the crew left on the steamer were congregated in the bow, eagerly following every movement of their comrades. A hard race was going on between the crews of the two boats for the privilege of boarding the wreck first.

"Beagles is leading," remarked Corby, taking an interest in the race. He was watching them through the binoculars. Allister stood close by his side. "He's going to beat," he added, chuckling. "Corrigan will most likely have a fit if he don't land first."

"How near are they?" asked Allister lazily.

"'Most there. Yep. Beagles is first. He's reached the side."

"How far behind is Corrigan?"

"About two boat-lengths. Now he's there. They're scrambling over the side. Hell, what luck! I wish I was there!"

"Luck's a queer thing, Corby," remarked Allister. "You can never tell when it's going to turn the tables on you. Is Corrigan himself aboard yet?"

"Yes, he's just scrambled over the side. I'd know Jim Corrigan's figger anywhere. He climbs like an ape."

"And looks like one!" replied Allister.

Corby turned around to resent this slur upon the leader, but he never got the binoculars quite from his eyes. A blinding, skull-crushing blow on his head by an iron pin knocked him senseless. He gasped for breath, opened his eyes, closed them, and reeled backward. Allister caught his body in an arm and gently eased it to the deck. The attack had been so sudden and unexpected, and executed with such skill, that there hadn't been the slightest noise to attract the few seamen below.

Having disposed of his guard, Allister dragged the inert body to the wheelhouse. A glimpse in the face showed him that the man was not dead, but simply stunned.

"I'll have to make sure, Corby, that you can't come back," Allister said, grinning. "There's too much at stake."

With a small coil of rope he had managed to conceal in a locker for this very purpose, Allister bound his victim hand and foot, and then, chucking him into a corner, wiped his perspiring brow. He glanced out of the window at the derelict. Both small boats were emptied. The crews were safely aboard the wreck, probably already snarling and fighting over the loot.

Allister smiled. His plans had worked out according to program so far. Relieving his prisoner of a nasty dirk and two navy automatics, he turned to the whistle. At first he thought he would call down the tube to Sutton, and warn him of what had happened; but on second thought he changed his mind. The signal would be understood, if Si had carried out his part.

Five sharp blasts of the siren suddenly awakened the echoes of the air, startling the seamen on deck and carrying a little doubt and perplexity to the minds of Corrigan and Beagles aboard the derelict. Exactly what it meant not one of the mutineers knew; but there were others who did.

CHAPTER XVII.

FAST AND FURIOUS.

THE echo of the last blast had barely died out on the air before Allister bounded from the wheelhouse and made for the stairway. Time was all-important now, for at any moment Corrigan or Beagles might get suspicious and return.

At the foot of the stairs he met a burly seaman on his way to the upper deck to inquire the meaning of the five whistles. Not expecting to meet trouble on the way, he carried his arms in his belt. Allister could easily have shot him, but he wished to reserve his ammunition and keep all shooting until the last. The sounds of shots on the Princeps might reach Corrigan's ears and bring him back in hot haste.

Without warning Allister rushed at the man, and before he could draw caught him in the stomach and completely paralyzed him for a moment. Before he could recover Allister was on him, pounding his head against the deck until it seemed to crack under the violent impacts.

Relieving the seaman of his weapons to add to his little arsenal, Allister continued his trip to the main deck. He was so well armed now that he felt equal to half a dozen men. His objective point was where Jane and her charges were quartered.

In the fight they might attempt to break out, and get hurt in the scrimmage. He wasn't disappointed in this. Jane, with her little repeater in her hand, opened the door just as Allister reached it.

"Don't come on deck," he said sharply. "Stay in there with the others until it's over."

Instead of obeying, she stepped outside.

"I am going—to do my share." she said coolly.

"Where's Si?" asked Allister, changing the subject.

"In the forward cabin. He's gone to release the prisoners."

"Good old Si. I knew he'd do his part."

"Where are the crew?" she asked anxiously.

"On the main deck, except Corby and another. They're resting comfortably above."

"You've killed them?" she asked.

"No, just put them temporarily to sleep. But, Miss Jane, I must ask you to go inside and keep the ladies quiet. Lock yourself in with them."

"I'll lock them in, but I'm going to stay outside."

Allister gazed into the fearless eyes. They were beautiful in their intensity, shining with splendid courage and indomitable will. He knew she would not obey him.

"Where is the key, Miss Jane?" he asked. "Let me lock the door."

She gave it to him without questioning.

"This door?" he added, pointing.

"Yes," she nodded, moving near it.

"Then forgive me, Miss Jane, but it's for your own good."

Before she could speak or move, he lifted her gently in his arms and dropped her inside.

The door closed with a snap, and the lock clicked.

"I'm sorry!" he apologized.

"Let me out, please!" she said.

But Allister shook his head and turned away. There was a sound of a struggle below, a few oaths, and the tramping of feet. When Allister reached the lower deck he saw the cause of it. Billy Sutton had emerged from the engine-room, swinging a long-handled wrench over his head as three seamen tried to close in upon him.

"You devils, I'll play this on your skulls!" growled Billy, backing away but flaying the air with his weapon.

One of the seamen stopped and pulled a gun from his belt. Billy saw it and tried to reach him, but failed. Allister had no time to get to his friend's side. He stopped long enough to take a quick aim and fire. The man plunged forward to the deck without exploding his own gun.

The report of the pistol immediately sent the alarm from one end of the steamer to the other. Until then the fight had been merely local. It promised now to become general. Sutton sprang upon one of the seamen, whose attention had been distracted by the shot behind, and felled him with his wrench. The other, finding himself alone, fired wildly, and turned to flee. Allister brought him to the deck with a broken leg.

"Drop that wrench, Billy, and arm yourself with their guns!" shouted Allister, abstracting the weapons from pockets of his nearest victim.

"Sure, Burke, we'll pick their pockets, and make 'em eat out of our hands. I'm just itching to kill."

Disarmed, the wounded sailor was helpless, while his two companions had not yet regained consciousness. Leaving them behind, Sutton and Allister hurried forward where sounds of another combat arose.

A big man, covered with coal dust so that his own son failed to recognize him, was charging a mob with no other weapon than a long-handled furnace poker. The way he was laying about with this strange weapon threatened to disrupt the forces opposing him and drive them into ignominious flight.

"It's Mr. Anderson!" shouted Sutton. "Whoop! Ain't he a fighter! He's sand clean through!"

"Billy's father, you mean!"

Sutton made no reply, but charged the mutineers on the left, opening fire with both guns he had taken from the unconscious sailors. They broke, and fled almost into the arms of Allister, who, after holding them up, disarmed them and drove them into a corner.

"Dad! Dad!" shouted a high, boyish voice, and unmindful of the danger and the coal-dust, Billy rushed forward and flung his arms about the neck of the big man. There was a moment's pause while the two embraced, Sutton and Allister watching them smilingly.

A shrill squeal forward suddenly startled

them. "It's Si!" exclaimed Allister in alarm. "Come, Billy, he's in trouble. I forgot him and the prisoners in the cabin."

But when they turned a corner of the deck, they saw a strange sight. Lying prostrate on the deck was a sailor, vainly trying to protect his head from Si's skillet, which he was wielding with such speed and dexterity that dodging it was out of the question. Every time it came down on the head, Si squealed with delight.

"Holy mackerel!" exclaimed Sutton. "The Chink's gone crazy!"

"No, it's just his way of fighting. Let him have his fun. We must release the prisoners."

Si had not yet opened the door of the cabin where the third mate and Mr. Barker were imprisoned. Allister and Sutton applied their shoulders to it, and when it crashed in they fell sprawling at the feet of an excited group. Taking them for mutineers, the prisoners fell upon them, and for a few moments they rolled about the floor, fighting and scratching.

"He velly good friend of ours, Mister Barker!" screamed Si, entering the cabin. "Him Cap'n Burke and Mister Sutton. Let him up."

The banker scrambled to his feet, blood in his eyes, and the third mate, struggling with Sutton, managed to stammer: "If you're a friend, let up. You're choking the life out of me."

"You're gouging me eye out," replied Sutton. "Quit it now and we'll call it square."

With legs and arms disentangled, they scrambled to their feet. Allister immediately took command. "Have you any weapons?" he asked, addressing the banker and the third mate. "I can spare one apiece. Keep together now, and follow me."

With their forces joined they presented a formidable front to the few remaining mutineers, and when they appeared and opened fire on them they exchanged a few shots, and then threw up their hands.

The fight was over. The ship was in their hands. Allister ran forward, and glanced at the wreck in the distance. The two small boats had put out from it, and were returning, the shots having attracted the attention of Corrigan and Beagles.

"They're returning, Billy," he called. "We must get off before they reach us. Take some of your stokers back and keep up steam. I'm going to the bridge."

Billy nodded, and started for the engine-room. On the way up Allister stopped to turn the key in the lock to release Jane and the ladies.

"You can come out now," he said smiling. "The ship's ours. But we must get away before the rest of the gang returns. I'm going to the bridge."

He raced for the upper deck, taking the stairs in a few long jumps. As he ran for the wheel-house he glanced at the returning boats. They were getting dangerously close.

Then with closed lips he started for the house, plunging headlong through the open door. As he did so there was a crack, and a thousand stars seemed to flash before his eyes. He had one glimpse of Corby standing over him, with a billet of wood in his hands, and then he lost consciousness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OUR CREED AND LAW.

ALLISTER'S loss of memory was only temporary, a mere slip into the darkness of oblivion caused by the blow on the head, a sort of daze that was immediately followed by a swift reaction. As if preternaturally awakened from a sleep to alert activity, his mind took in everything that had happened. Corby had recovered consciousness during the fight on the lower deck, and managed to free himself from his bonds. Then with malignant hatred he had laid for Allister in the wheel-house, and the moment he appeared had delivered a crushing blow on the head.

The man was crouching over him now, with hands raised to finish the job. Allister could see the leering, triumphant face, the red scar that disfigured it, the billet of wood in his hands raised to crush his skull, the play of the muscles of the arms as they contracted and tightened, the very twitching

of his lips and throat, and the snapping of the black eyes.

And struggle as he would, vainly striving to bring back a normal functioning of brain and muscles, Allister could not move or protect himself from the finishing blow. It was as though he were hypnotized into absolute helplessness.

A growl escaped the lips of Corby, and the weapon in his hands reached the highest point of the arc over his head, poising there for a moment before descending.

Allister heard a sharp explosion back of him, a low groan from his enemy, and then club and man fell sidewise and rolled off his body. A bullet had pierced Corby's brain.

"Are you hurt?" a trembling voice at Allister's side asked, and a pair of arms tried to lift his head from the hard deck.

"Jane!" he murmured. "How'd you get here in time?"

"I followed you," she replied. "I thought you might need help. The boats are nearly here."

"The boats! Yes, yes, we must get away!"

He tried to struggle to his feet, but his body and limbs quivered with weakness. "Help me to get to the wheel!" he added hoarsely. "I must reach it!"

Supporting him with both arms, she led him up the few steps. Allister seized the spokes of the wheel.

"Signal—signal for full speed ahead!" he gasped. "No, I'll do it!"

Somewhere below in the vitals of the steamer a bell clanged, and Sutton, standing by ready for prompt action, responded so quickly that the propellers began churning the water before the metallic echo had died away. The Princeps was in motion, with Corrigan and Beables only three boats length away.

"Port her! Port her!" cried Allister, trying to summon sufficient strength to turn the wheel. Jane sprang to his assistance, throwing her whole strength into the effort. Allister smiled as the steamer cleared the boats by a few yards and swept past them.

"You've cleared them," Jane said. "But why? If you'd kept straight on we'd have run them down."

"Yes, and I didn't want to do that."

Her eyes looked inquiringly at him, but her lips were silent. "I wanted to save them for another fate," he volunteered, smiling. "If we'd run them down we couldn't leave them struggling in the water. Could we?"

A flush came into her cheeks, and she bit her under lip. "No," she murmured finally, a little ashamed of the spirit of revenge that had surged up in her. "And yet they deserve it."

"As much as any man deserved death," he added solemnly. "And yet they're entitled to a fair trial. Isn't that our creed and law?"

Jane was silent, her cheeks suffused by a warm color, her eyes moist and softened. When she glanced at him again, she was smiling gently.

"Do you give all your enemies a fair trial?" she asked, a little whimsically.

He did not answer, forgetting himself in gazing into the eyes and face so close to his, and for a moment he was oblivious to everything else except that they were alone on a wide, wide sea, with her arms half supporting him, her breath on his cheeks.

Mr. Baker, the banker, third officer Smith, Dr. Shipman, and Billy Anderson's dad, came trooping up the stairs, and broke in upon their séance.

"What are you going to do with those mutineers in the boats?" demanded the first. "Why not sink them? We could easily do it."

"Yes, but that would be murder," smiled Allister.

"Well, they murdered Captain Ansell and—"

"Is one murder any excuse for another?"

"You're not going to rescue them, are you?" interrupted the steamer's surgeon. "Why, man, they'd overpower us and retake the ship again."

"No, I don't think we'll do that."

"Then, what—

"I see," interrupted Mr. Anderson, grinning through the coal dust covering his face, "we're going to leave them here to their fate. It will be more horrible than killing them outright. They'll starve to

death by degrees, if they don't go insane and kill each other."

"Yes, we're going to leave them in the Sargasso," replied Allister slowly, "but not to starve."

"How's that? I don't understand."

"We'll provision another boat with enough to last them a month. They'll have that derelict for a home until—"

The others frowned, and waited for him to proceed.

"—until," Allister added slowly, "they can be picked up by a warship or revenue cutter. We can give the exact location. They can't get away. That derelict can't drift far. It's caught in the gulf-weed. Within a couple of weeks, if we have luck in meeting a revenue cutter or warship, they 'll be picked up and taken away as prisoners. In that way we justify the law—and, incidentally"—smiling—"give Corrigan and his gang all the taste of the Sargasso they want. They've been anxious to get here. Now let them stay a few weeks and enjoy themselves."

"That's the best way out of this difficulty," nodded Mr. Baker, after a pause, "and a just punishment for them. I quite agree with—with—what did you say your name was?"

"Allister."

"Well, Captain Allister, we owe you a debt of gratitude we can never pay. I've learned by degrees from that Chinaman, who, by the way, I'm going to engage as my cook—"

"Si's already promised to cook for me," interrupted Jane, smiling.

"In that case, I'm without a cook," said Allister. "Si's an ungrateful—"

"Oh, if you want him I won't take him away from you," added Jane hastily, flushing.

"We'll let Si decide that."

The few uninjured mutineers left aboard were already in irons, and the wounded ones in the hospital under Dr. Shipman's care. Corrigan and Beagles soon gave up the chase, for they had no chance of overtaking the steamer.

A few miles away the Princeps stopped once more, while an extra boat, swinging from the davits, was loaded down with water and provisions—enough to feed the stranded mutineers a full month. Dr. Shipman added a few medicines, with instructions how to use them, declaring that for humanity's sake it was his duty to give all aid possible to the sick or wounded.

Then the course of the steamer was reversed. The mutineers watched her return with wondering, hopeful eyes, but when within hailing distance the loaded boat was lowered into the water and cast adrift.

Standing forward, with a group of his friends, Allister spoke through the megaphone. "Corrigan," he called, "you'll find water and provisions in that small boat. Help yourselves. You won't starve until rescue comes. You'll have plenty of time to hunt for derelicts and loot them. But don't stray too far away, or you'll get lost. The Sargasso's a big sea."

"Ain't you going to take us back with you, cap'n?" whined the outlaw. "We'll be good. We'll go in irons if you say so."

"No, there isn't room aboard. Goodby."

The steamer swept past them on the homeward trip. Anger and furious wrath seized the leader of the mutineers. Whipping out his pistol, he fired vengefully into the group.

"Duck!" warned Allister, as the shots sped over their heads harmlessly.

"The devil!" growled Anderson, returning the fire.

"Yes," admitted Allister, "but he'll get his due. It will be a greater punishment to let him live here a few weeks than to kill him. Perhaps his own crew may settle that. Who knows?"

CHAPTER XIX.

COALS OF FIRE.

THE surviving third officer of the Princeps took turns with Allister in navigating the steamer out of the Sargasso to the nearest lane of ocean travel, and once free of the gulf-weed the Princeps justified the boast of her builders that she was a crack flier. With order brought on deck and below, the passengers willingly doing their share as seamen, oilers and stok-

ers, now that they were in command of the ship, Allister had ample opportunity to recuperate from the ugly blow he had received on his head.

Within a few days he was fully recovered. On a warm, starlit night he was on duty at the wheel. There was little required except to gaze idly ahead across the phosphorescent sea, and guide the steamer on her course with an occasional turn of the wheel. The upper deck was deserted, and he was alone with his own thoughts. Suddenly a shadow drifted across the deck, and Jane Worden was by his side. A light, filmy scarf was thrown across her head, protecting the rebellious hair from the wind.

"It's a wonderful night at sea," remarked Allister, greeting her with a smile of welcome. "There's nothing quite like moonlight on these warm seas. It gets into your blood, and makes you—"

"Yes, I feel it," she interrupted. "I'll almost hate to get into port."

Allister turned to her. "Your father must be worried," he observed. "He'll be glad to see you back."

"My father! Daddy! You don't know?" she murmured, her eyes filling. "He—he's dead—died a week before I left. That's why I was taking this trip—to forget!"

Allister drew a deep breath. So Jim Worden, his old enemy, was no more! There was no longer any chance of getting revenge—not unless he took it out on his only child.

He turned, as this vagrant thought flitted across his mind, and smiled at her. She drew away a pace and gazed at him.

"You're glad?" she said in a low, trembling voice.

"Glad!" he repeated after her. "Why should I be glad, Miss Jane?"

"Because—because," she began, stammering. "Oh, I know—I know all about what daddy did to you years ago! He told me—told me everything."

"Death-bed repentance!" came bitterly from Allister's lips before he could think.

"No," she said sharply. "You wrong him. I do not wish to excuse daddy, or—or to condone his crime. It was terrible! I can never forgive him for that. He didn't ask me! He didn't want me to! But he repented of it years ago. It worried him, and—and I'm sure it had much to do with his death. He was an old, broken-down man before his time."

"He didn't try to make any amends," muttered Allister, his black mood still on him. "If he'd repented, he'd taken some steps to clear my name—"

"He did! He confessed to the judge who sentenced you, and had your name cleared of all crime. Then he tried to find you—advertised for you—put detectives on your trail. But you had vanished so completely that no one could find you. Poor daddy was afraid you were dead, and the thought that he was responsible for it made his suffering worse. Oh, Captain Allister, can't you see how he suffered? Toward the end it haunted him, and before he died he pleaded with me to—to—make every attempt to find you. And if I did—"

"What?" Allister asked, when she paused, his face smiling now.

"Why—why do everything I could to—to explain, and help you."

"Pay me money?" he interrupted a little sharply.

Her face crimsoned and the eyes filled with pain. He regretted his words almost immediately.

"Forgive me, Miss Jane," he added contritely. "I shouldn't have said that. You must make allowances for—for what I've been through. For six years I've been knocking around in these southern seas, an outcast, a wanderer, a man who was afraid to go back home. Naturally my thoughts were bitter. Yes, at times they were murderous. Do you know why I fled?"

He looked at her with burning eyes in which the old slumbering passion smoldered.

"It was to escape from myself," he added finally, when she shook her head. "I couldn't trust myself! I knew that if I met your father I'd kill him in a passion, and to escape that I vanished. The very sight of one of his steamers aroused the old feeling in me. You heard me one day confess to Corrigan that I'd kill Jim Worden, if I found him aboard, unless I was stopped?"

She nodded her head.

"And it made you hate me—"

"Yes, and afraid of you," she admitted frankly.

"You thought I had joined the mutineers, and had used your letter to betray you?" he added, smiling.

Again she nodded, her face troubled and perplexed.

"Yes, until that night you saved me from the seaman, and—and—threw him overboard."

"Then you were no longer afraid of me?"

She shook her head slowly. "I think," she replied after a pause, "I was more afraid of you than ever that night. Your face—when you picked up the seaman, and held him over your head—was—was—"

"I understand," he said gently, when she paused and shuddered. "You were afraid that I might do the same to your father or to you when I found out you were his daughter. Wasn't that it?"

"No, I wasn't afraid for myself, but—but I didn't see how I could ever tell you—tell you what I've just told you."

He smiled and lapsed into a long silence. Somehow the shadow that had haunted his life had become nebulous. It was no longer a nightmare. Had it not, after all, been a creation of his imagination? What satisfaction was there in killing for the sake of an old grudge? Would it give him peace of mind, or would it forever haunt and torment him?

He gave the spokes a few automatic turns to bring the steamer back on her course from which she had momentarily slipped.

"Miss Jane," he said gently, turning to her again, "the old grudge is wiped out. The pain of it is gone. If your father was here I could look him in the eyes, and tell him that I'd forgotten and forgiven. Will that help your peace of mind?"

"Oh, Captain Allister!" she exclaimed, placing a warm hand on one of his. "You're—you're generous! You're demolishing me by heaping coals of fire on my head. I believe that's a part of your plan of revenge," she added, her cheeks dimpling.

"No," he said soberly, "if I was seeking revenge, I'd—I'd—"

"What?" she asked, smiling whimsically into his eyes, and pressing his hand slightly.

"What!" he repeated, his eyes flaming. He caught the hand and pressed it to his lips. "What would I do?" he went on quickly. "I'd steal his daughter, and run away with her, just as I ran away with one of his steamers, and take her to the Sargasso Sea or some other lonely region, and—and hold her until she confessed she loved me. Then—"

"That would be dreadful," she interrupted without a trace of resentment in her voice. "But I'm not sure it wouldn't be a perfectly delightful experience unless—"

"Jane!" he interrupted, catching her in his arms, and allowing the wheel to spin around so the bow of the Princeps veered three points off the course. "Jane, I love you! Can you love me a little?"

"Oh, Burke, can't you see it?"

Outside a heavy tread on the deck moved toward them. "I'll relieve you now, captain. My trick at the wheel." It was Smith, the third officer of the Princeps, just coming on duty.

(The end.)

AFTERNOON

BY HATTIE WHITNEY

A LILAC light about her pathway narrows;
Fine points of flame from out her quiver gleam,
Till suddenly she drops her golden arrows,
And dips her feet in twilight's silver stream.

Sara Was Judith

An Enigma

by Julian Hawthorne

Author of "A Goth from Boston," "Doris Dances," "Absolute Evil," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

THIS is a story—or a biography—written by Martha Klemm, psychic and perhaps the reincarnation of a Salem ancestress hanged for witchcraft. Our readers will remember her for the parts she played in "A Goth from Boston," and "Absolute Evil."

Sara, a woman chiefly remarkable for her absolutely colorless personality and forceless mentality, married an elderly Boston business-man, John Roadnight. Examination by Dr. Topham Brent, a lifelong admirer of Martha's, convinced the physician that Sara was suffering from some internal disease—perhaps cancer. Yet when a child, Judith, was born to the middle-aged couple, the baby girl was beautiful and physically perfect; and after her birth the mother's disease seemed to be arrested.

Martha Klemm, between trips abroad—where she held interesting conversations with Lyof Rudol, a tailor, but a man of learning—watched the development of Judith; indeed, between the child and Martha there seemed to be a closer bond than between Judith and her parents, who worshiped her. She tolerated her father and was openly contemptuous of her mother.

The Roadnights lived on the north shore of Massachusetts. Much of Judith's time was spent on or in the water. When she was twelve years old she met Drake Frobisher, the son of a rich and indulgent mother who lived near by. One day there was a storm; Drake was at sea in his catboat, and Judith was drowned while trying to rescue him. Later he was saved.

Sara hanged herself. Dr. Brent and Martha worked over her for a long time, but could find no sign of life. Then, while they were in another part of the house, Martha had a vision of Judith arising from the sea and going into the room where Sara was lying. Later there came a cry, and investigation showed that Sara was alive. But when she recovered consciousness she thought that she was Judith, and John Roadnight made the same mistake.

After a long trip in the East Martha Klemm visited London and the studio of an artist, who told her that he was painting the portrait of the most beautiful woman in the world. This woman turned out to be Sara—or Judith—who was in London with John Roadnight. She told Martha that after coming back to consciousness she had had the body of Sara, but that it gradually had changed until she was again Judith, but a woman instead of a child. Men were mad for her. Drake still loved her. She felt herself all powerful.

Judith told Drake that if he could win her he could have her. With Martha they visited Dresden. There Drake despaired of winning her, and gave up his wooing. "I can't save him," said Judith. "I do—what I am." She felt that her fate was in the hands of Destiny.

CHAPTER XIX.

COURTESIES EXCHANGED.

THERE was to be an "extra" concert at the Breul'schen Terrasse the next evening, and Judith, for no apparent reason other than that, said she would like to stay on for the present. "If you don't mind?" she added, pleasantly, to Drake, at breakfast.

The alteration in his manner continued to be visible, but it was subdued. He had undergone what Topham might have called a major operation, on the spiritual plane, and would never again be the passion-led boy: he didn't flinch from Judith, and was as chivalrous as ever, but preoccupied and cool.

The finer qualities of manhood were developing in him fast. There was in him no

trace of that hankering attitude which would characterize an underbred nature. He had cut himself off with a clean stroke, resolved, though he died for it, not to compromise his self-respect. He made no pretence of an artificial animation—of bravado—but failed in no conventional attentions: It was if the immortal soul in him stood apart, and compelled the mutilated and wronged temporal part to maintain its dignity.

I had expected that Judith would have dismissed him out of common humanity; but she showed no such disposition. Solicitude for others' comfort didn't belong to her.

To put her conduct in its best light, she accepted his sacrifice with royal serenity. She was sovereign, and could take no more than her due, even in taking all.

On the other hand, she betrayed not the slightest tendency to coquetry. She had drawn his heart's blood, and was content. If he were willing to serve her convenience in other respects, she felt no remorse in so using him. The vulgarity of petty torture had no interest for her: she struck to kill, and passed on.

The Breul'schen Terrasse is an avenue four or five hundred yards in length along the bank of the Elbe on a high retaining-wall of stone. Fashion uses it as a parade-ground in the afternoons and evenings: and at the northerly end it expands into a rounded area large enough to contain a roofed restauration and, adjoining it, an open-air beer-garden. Very good concerts are given here every afternoon and evening.

We came there early, while the sky was still full of sunset light, and took an outer table, commanding a large view of the river flowing through its picturesque valley, and the towers and ramparts of the Waldschloessen Brewery rising like a great castle on the farther side of the stream. The little tables were crowded together, leaving scant space for the kellners to edge their way between them, bearing schoppen and plates of food, hot or cold, to the audience, which scruples not, after the German fashion, to gobble and guzzle during the divine utterances of Mozart and Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Wagner, hardly suspending their industry long enough for outbursts of unctuous applause and guttural bravos.

The usual crowd was present—persons in society, tradesmen of the better class with their frows, English and American visitors, officers of the army, and a few private soldiers, who always rose and saluted when an officer made his appearance. Four of these privates were occupying a table a short distance from ours. As I sat observing their innocent pleasure, they suddenly rose and stiffened as one man, and their hands went to their caps.

Turning my head, I saw two officers, one of whom was Rudesheim, strolling round the circumference of our circle. Rudesheim's eyes fell upon Judith. She did not return his look, or seem conscious of it. He had halted, and after a moment's conference with his companion, they pushed their way to the privates' table, and, with a wave of the hand, ordered them to retire. A kellner cleared the table, and they sat down, Rudesheim facing toward our party.

Drake, who was looking in another direction, where a little steamboat was puffing and paddling its way up the river, paid no attention to the newcomers, and Judith maintained her impassivity. I wondered whether the episode were a surprise to her.

The band, with sweating brows, in their heavy uniforms, were performing the first part of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The last rays of the sun touched the pinnacles of the Waldschloessen: it was a lovely and peaceful scene, with which the music eloquently blended.

A flower-pedler came along, his arms loaded with fresh flowers which he was proffering to all and sundry. Rudesheim beckoned to him, looked over his stock, and selected a brilliant bouquet. He took a card from the breast of his tunic, scribbled something on it, and summoned a kellner. He gave directions to the man, indicating our table, and handed him the flowers, amid which he placed his card. The man nodded, and came toward us.

Many persons had noticed what was going on, and watched for the outcome with interest. Rudesheim's act was an insult, of course; but his high connections gave him a charter for libertinism, and our party

being foreigners, were fair game. Moreover, Judith's egregious beauty might seem to palliate the baron's impertinence.

The arrival of the flowers roused Drake from his reverie. The kellner extended them to Judith, mumbling explanations, and pointing to Rudesheim, who stood up at the same moment, smiling and bowing.

She took the bouquet with an air of surprise, arching her brows. She smelt them, touched the blossoms with her fingers, found the card, read it, and passed it to Drake with a smile. She did not look toward Rudesheim. Just then our kellner brought us the coffee we had ordered, and set the smoking cups before us.

"Nice flowers!" remarked Drake, after looking at the card. "Do you know this gentleman?" He looked round at the same moment, and saw the baron resuming his seat.

"He has never been presented to me. I've seen him," Judith said, indifferently.

Drake stood up and contemplated the baron for a moment. The music had ceased, and there was a hush of expectation over the tables.

"Do you wish to send them back?" Drake asked, sitting down again, and speaking very quietly and gently.

She looked at him. "They're pretty; I think I'll keep them."

I said to Drake: "Send him a thaler with your compliments; it will turn the laugh against him!"

"Capital idea!" returned he, his eyes sparkling. "To make sure he understands, though, I'll pay him myself!"

He felt in his pocket for a coin, laughing to himself in a peculiar, soft way, as if a droll notion had come into his mind. He got up from his chair, took up his coffee, saucer and all, glancing over toward Rudesheim in a good-natured way; his hand was steady, and none of the coffee was spilled. Still smiling good-naturedly, he stepped over toward the officers' table with an air as if he were going to indulge in some amusing repartee.

The baron, who had kept his eyes on him, didn't rise from his chair; his handsome lips curved in a contemptuous grimace; I could fancy him muttering: "These cowardly American swine!" I didn't share the baron's assurance.

Drake made a polite bow to Rudesheim, and bending over, said something to him, which I couldn't catch at that distance. Then, with a quick, forcible turn of the wrist, he dashed the coffee full in the other's sneering face. While the man was gagging, he caught him by the nose with his left hand, and with his right crammed the big silver thaler into his mouth.

Then, always with that amused expression, he took out his card-case, placed a card on the table in front of the baron, to be examined at his leisure, and returned to us nonchalantly. The thing was beautifully done in every detail.

Rudesheim and his companion were now on their feet, vociferating and gesticulating, and the baron's sword was coming out of the scabbard. The crowd was jabbering with excitement; men were hurrying women out of danger. The officer with the baron had seized the latter's sword arm, and was addressing him vehemently.

Drake resumed his chair, signaled to a kellner, and ordered: "*Noch eine tasse kaffee, bitte!*" Judith's arms were resting on the table, the flowers between them. Her face had paled a little, but seemed as unmoved as the Sphinx. Drake, returning his card-case to his pocket, gave her one look, deliberate, stern, and final.

I pushed back my chair and said: "Let us be going."

At that moment there loomed above us a very tall figure, broad-shouldered and athletic, with a beautiful countenance, dark and calm. He towered above the crowd.

I had met him in London, on his return from his famous ride to Khiva. His name was known round the world for daring adventure. He was to die not long afterward on the front of the British square that met the charge of the "Fuzzy-wuzzies" in the Sudan.

He recognized me with an inclination, but addressed himself to Drake, speaking low and with deference.

"I hope you'll pardon the liberty I'm taking. Here is my card. I happened to observe the rebuke—well merited!—that you gave that blackguard. His social and

military position in Prussia will probably compel him to take notice of it.

"In that case, you—er—you would greatly honor me by permitting me to act in your behalf. If you'll favor me with your address here, I'll wait upon you—I beg these ladies to excuse my interruption!"

Drake had risen, and he and the tall captain spoke in undertones for a few minutes. Meanwhile, the companion of Rudesheim approached, with bulging eyes—yellow-haired, red-faced, crackling with stiffness. He bowed jerkily; the captain looked down on him with a nod.

Drake withdrew a pace while the other two spoke together. Presently the German clicked his heels and stalked off to rejoin his principal. The captain turned to us with a grave smile, made an obeisance to me, ignoring Judith, and shook hands cordially with Drake. Then he strode away down the avenue, his shoulders swinging rhythmically as he went, eminent over all other men. An English gentleman of the true breed!

The flowers had fallen from the table, and Judith's foot trod on them as we passed out. They had served their purpose. We walked slowly toward the hotel.

"I'm sorry you should have been annoyed by this thing," said Drake, avoiding speaking to Judith only. "Nothing much will come of it, of course—just a formality, for etiquette's sake. One has to expect such things in this country. They're giving 'La Belle Hélenè out at the country theater to-night; shall we go?"

Argive Helen had "launched a thousand ships, and burned the topless towers of Ilium." Her modern representative seemed to be crossing the threshold of a career as disastrous. It was not for her to take active part in the battle; she would stand neutral on her high wall, and watch men and gods struggle for her sake.

But she knew that Drake was lost to her; whether or not he survived the meeting of the coming morning, his love for her was dead; and she perhaps realized that no other man would ever love her, though lust and fate led them to spill blood and gold at her feet. She had suffered the last bridge that connected her with common human nature to be destroyed, and the powers of evil were closing around her, as the black storm-cloud had closed in that summer afternoon by Devil's Rib.

She said, in answer to Drake's suggestion, that she didn't care for any more music at present; and when we got to the hotel, she locked herself in her room, and denied herself, that night, even to me. Drake, having escorted us to the door, excused himself and went off, probably to keep an appointment with the captain. I never saw him again.

Judith was not at breakfast the next morning, and I sat at our table alone. When I came out of the room I found the captain waiting. I knew what that meant.

After greeting me, he asked whether he could also see Judith.

I replied: "Tell me, and I'll tell her."

"Mr. Frobisher and Rudesheim met early this morning in a field outside the city limits," he said. "The agreement was for pistols; I insisted that my principal knew nothing of other weapons, and the quarrel was serious. He had told me that he knew little of the use of firearms, either, but of course we didn't disclose that fact to the other parties. There was a surgeon with us, but, as it unhappily turned out, none was needed.

"Rudesheim, at the last moment, offered to accept an apology; but Mr. Frobisher, rightly as I think, declined. I gave the word; only one shot was exchanged; Mr. Frobisher received a bullet in the forehead, and died immediately."

The captain had spoken with his eyes lowered; he now looked up.

"I wish to say that I never knew a finer, braver, more lovable chap. We had known each other only a few hours, but I feel his loss very deeply—I shall never forget him. He was unfamiliar with the procedure, but his conduct on the field was perfect."

"Did he leave any message?"

"He wished, in case of a fatal result, to be buried here. He said he had left a will, which would be found in his trunk. He asked me to thank you for your kindness. I fancy that's all. He consented to let me attend to any legal formalities in connection with the meeting, and as to his burial."

"Was there no word for my friend—for Mrs. Roadnight?"

The captain fixed his great black eyes on mine and shook his head grimly.

"The lady was not mentioned," he said coldly.

I declined his offer of escort back to London, and he took his leave.

I found Judith's door still locked, and knocked on it, as I had years before knocked at Sara's door at Saraband. A housemaid fetched a key from the office, and we went in. The room was empty, and the trunks were gone, and the housekeeper, coming up, informed me that the lady had paid her bill and departed very early that morning. On her dressing-table I found a sealed note addressed to me; it was unbelievable!

DEAR AUNTIE:

I have gone with Rudesheim; it seemed the only thing to do. You and I will meet again.

JUDITH.

CHAPTER XX.

THE INEVITABLE TORTOISE.

WITH the note in my hand and, for the moment, hardly knowing what I was doing, I found myself in the lobby below. At the desk, talking with the clerk, stood a man leaning on his left elbow, and with his back turned toward me. But there was something familiar to me about his back! The man was dressed in a black sack-suit, and had on his head a black hat of soft felt. A black leather valise stood on the floor beside him.

As I approached, his talk with the clerk came to an end, and he turned to pick up his valise. He didn't seem fully to recognize me until I had spoken.

"John! What brought you here?"

He smiled, holding my hand, and gazing at me in his dim, amiable way.

"Well, I figured I'd look you up," he said. "I don't know—I had a sort of hunch Sara might be wanting me. So I packed my grip and lit out. But the folks here tells me she settled up and left this morning; couldn't tell me where she's gone, but says there was a train went north around that time, so I was figuring I'd see if maybe she was in Berlin.

"Well, Miss Martha, you're a sight for sore eyes, as you always were! You don't happen to know what Sara had in her mind?"

He didn't appear to be suffering from anxiety; and to this day I don't know what chance, impulse, or premonition had launched him on his journey, which was destined to be much longer than either of us could have imagined. He accepted the situation, as he had accepted the metamorphosis of his wife, in the way a child might—an occurrence in the way of nature, demanding no special explanation.

My instant feeling was that he must be told nothing about Rudesheim; as for Drake, John was probably unaware that he had been our fellow traveler. The best I could do would be to induce him to return to London.

"Sara got tired of Dresden," I said; "she changes her mind suddenly, as you know. She was restless, and went off at a moment's notice, without saying where she was going—I dare say she didn't know, herself! If you were to turn right round and go back to London, it's as likely as not you might find her there."

But the old man had his little obstinacies.

"Yes—yes, you might be right, Miss Martha; but then again it seems like, since I've got started, I'd best keep on. There's no telling about those sort of things—about luck, as you might say. There's no special hurry—if she should really want me, I figure that I'd be there, somehow or other. And that gentleman was telling me there's another train on the same line about half an hour from now, so I guess I'd better be on my way.

"Glad to have met up with you, Miss Martha, I am indeed! We'll all be getting together again, down at Saraband one of these days! Well, I'll be going—good-by!"

I felt the uncertain pressure of his old hand for a moment, and then saw him toddle busily off with his valise. What a pathetic infant to be traversing Europe on such an errand! And suppose, by some monstrous chance, he should come face to

face with Judith and Rudesheim—what then?

And yet I had an impression of a kind of spiritual inevitability about John Roadnight, as if he, too, were in the harness of fate. Or is it that simple innocence and goodness possess an incalculable power?

For a full year, I heard nothing of, or from, any of the personages in the drama. I had gone back to London, and one day I met Topham Brent on Piccadilly.

He was bronzed and grizzled, and had lost weight.

"I heard you'd gone to Mesopotamia to look for the origins of the human race," I said. "Were you successful?"

"No; but what is as good, I've lost interest in it," he replied. "The human race was never more interesting than at the present moment. And there's a lot of it right here in London. Are you busy? Let's spend the rest of the day together!"

We hired a nice two-seated wagon and a well-groomed cob—there were such things in those days—and drove out to Richmond Park. The country was green, blooming and fresh. The innumerable oaks on Richmond Hill were rich in leaf.

After stabling out trap, we ordered dinner at the Star and Garter, which was still in running order, though not so imposing as in Thackeray's era, and then went out for an hour's stroll over the park. We found a seat under an oak, and looked out over the famous view of the Thames and the meadows of Twickenham; and after a while we began to talk of things gone by.

"Paris is good," said Topham; "London is better; but Mesopotamia is the devil! Henceforth I shall live up to the neck in civilization, and know the nicest people only!"

"I sometimes feel yearnings toward Boston!" said I. "Do you remember Sara Roadnight—or Judith, rather?"

He picked up an acorn, and tossed it away. "Do you remember the storm, and Sara hanging herself in the clothes-closet, and—yes, that was a queer case! Did you meet her afterward?"

"Meet who?"

"Your point is well taken!—the lady, whoever she was, of whom John was an appanage. The alter-ego, the supersession, the hallucination, who, or which, emerged in the space till then occupied by Mrs. Roadnight and her daughter."

I outlined the story for him. When I told of the death—the murder—of Drake Frobisher, he shook his head and set his lips.

"Horrible! Devils incarnate could do no worse. And she actually went off with the scoundrel who killed him! At any rate, you were well rid of her. I knew the creature was a mischief-maker, but I didn't think she'd go so far. You were right—we shouldn't have cut Sara down from her peg. She was doing the best she could!"

"In spite of it all, she has an invincible attraction for me," I confessed. "Her beauty means something! I can't measure her by ordinary standards. She is a cog in the great machine of the universe. She isn't responsible—she must act as she does!"

"Oh, well! Satan can offer the same plea. A cobra can say it only does what it was made for! I admit, though, that she is infernally good looking. And I shouldn't have thought that poor young Frobisher could have cut himself loose as suddenly and completely as you say he did—in the ten minutes while he was waiting in the dark room."

"Such changes are less sudden than they seem; they begin deep down in us, long before we ourselves suspect it. At last, when all is ready, some outward event happens—the trap is sprung, as it were—and the truth appears! My talk with Drake sprung the trap, I suppose.

"And now that he's dead, poor boy, I'm glad of it! But it didn't need the bullet to kill him—he died in that dark room, while she was jesting about him to me, on the other side of the door!"

"Well said!" muttered he. "You have sharp eyes, when you choose to use them, Martha!"

"I haven't heard of her since," I remarked; "she seems to have drowned in a deeper sea than the Atlantic."

"She is alive, and looking extremely well," he rejoined. "I saw her, some six weeks ago, in Paris. But the man with her was not Rudesheim."

"You don't mean to say that John had found her?"

"As a matter of fact, John wasn't far off! Well, here's my story—not such tragedy as yours! I was loafing down the Rue de Rivoli, under the arcade—it was showering—and was looking in a shop-window, when somebody touched my elbow, and there was John! He explained that he was 'just tracking around after Sara,' and seeing me, thought perhaps I could give him a hint.

"I knew nothing of her then; I took him over to the Louvre, and we sat on a bench in the Hall of Venus, and gossiped for half an hour. It came out that he'd been chasing Sara all over Europe for a year or more, and had often been right on her heels, but had never quite come up with her."

"How was he—excited, tired, dazed?"

"Not at all; there was more pith and energy in him than when I'd seen him last. He didn't seem to resent her conduct, or even to think it extraordinary; and he wasn't cast down, or hopeless; on the contrary, he was serenely convinced that it would all come out right, and that he and Sara would be going back to Saraband, and pass their declining years there in peace and quiet.

"The fact is, I think, that the old fellow has become a sort of monomaniac, and that the never-ending occupation of pursuing Sara is doing him a lot of good, physically and mentally. Before the chase began he was in danger of perishing—he had sold out his business, you know—from lack of anything to do. He has hit upon an interminable job now, and he may go on living and prospering as long as Sara—or Judith—herself!"

"She is his profession!" I said, amused by the queerness of things.

"Yes, just that! And he has a kind of far-off inkling of the truth himself. He said, 'I figure it's what the Lord put me here for. You see, doctor, she's having her fling, and that's all right, for she never did get much of a show before now; and I wouldn't hold her back, not a mite; it tickles me to have her enjoying herself. All I want is, that when she feels she's had enough of it, and is ready to slow down, that I should be on hand right there to fetch her home to our place on the old North Shore, and take a good long rest.'

"I had recently arrived from Asia," continued Topham, leaning forward on his knees, with his hat tipped back from his forehead, "and had heard nothing of the woman's doings, and felt a little shy of asking questions, under the circumstances; but he gossiped along without my help. He said he figured that all women had fancies, and the way to do with 'em was to let 'em racket around till they found out for themselves what was what. He said he wasn't worrying, and that Sara would come out all right in the end."

"Had he heard that she went off with Rudesheim?"

"I don't know. You see, he's a sort of innocent mystery, roaming about in a world of his own, not like ours. There's nobody in Europe, except you and me, whom he could talk to about personal things. He might hear rumors of Judith's adventures—or Sara's—but he'd put his own interpretation on them.

"They might tell him of lovers of hers, but he would think they meant escorts—respectable persons whom she was allowing to serve her. In fact, I really almost believe that the idea that she has, or ever will, commit the traditional sin of woman, has not entered his mind."

"Well, Topham, suppose he were right?"

He looked round at me with an amazed half laugh.

"Yes," I continued, "you and I are people of the world, and the notion sounds absurd. But what is Judith? We don't know. Her origin and she herself are inscrutable. She is above or below our conception of a human being. She isn't governed by ordinary human motives and passions or weaknesses.

"When I'm away from her—out of touch with her—she always begins to seem to me a kind of beautiful, terrible, insatiable monster; a fatal disease in human shape. Leprosy, cancer, plague—such things are scourges of God, or of nature, or of the devil, if you like, come to make war upon our race. In old times, an infernal obsession, which called itself Legion, would some-

times take up its abode in mortal creatures; the particular body which it might occupy passed out of its own control. Common human sins and crimes wouldn't interest such a monster—it would strike deeper—at higher game.

"I see Judith infatuating men, torturing them, driving them mad, till they became so many carrion-heaps of despair and misery—and then herself going on from him to the next, free, fresh and untroubled."

"Without compromising her own chastity?"

"Yes; otherwise her power would be gone."

"An infernal sort of chastity, then."

"Yes, if disease be infernal. You said once that evil is disease of the spirit."

"And you think any man may be at her mercy?"

"No; I believe some are immune. Unless there be traitors in the man's own camp, she can't prevail. That Englishman who acted as Drake's second in the duel defied and despised her. And Drake himself had enough nobility to save his soul alive; and there have been others. But Rudesheim and his like—she annihilates them."

"Then you make her out to be a kind of blessing in disguise—extirpating human vermin? And she may have taken up with Rudesheim in order to punish him for shooting Drake."

"I believe she hates as little as she loves. Being what she is, the consequences follow of themselves—she neither helps nor hinders. If she personally were concerned—if she could feel human desires, disappointments, triumphs—she would burn up and vanish."

"I can't go with you, Martha," said he, unhappy and dissenting. "You give a kind of plausibility to these ideas, but they're not real to me; I must believe that the world is order, not chaos. I don't believe what you are saying, and I don't believe you believe it yourself. You are amusing yourself with fantasies."

"You may be right," returned I, laughing. "As I began by saying, I take this view of Judith only when we are apart; as soon as I see and touch her again, I am convinced she is a real flesh-and-blood person, like you and me, and I'm very fond of her. Meanwhile, why should we bother about her? By the way, though, didn't you mention having seen her very recently?"

"I did. But first, though I hadn't heard of the beginning of her Rudesheim adventure, I had heard of the end of it; do you know it?"

"No!"

"The Kaiser found out about the affair, and forbade the baron to cultivate her society. But Rudesheim was, by that time, so far gone that he disobeyed the imperial command. He was dismissed from the army in disgrace.

"He and Judith went to Monaco—I fancy they had been living extravagantly—and he tried to break the bank. He risked what he had—this is the story—and lost it; she wouldn't give him any; so he, as is customary, went out into the shrubbery and cut his throat."

"I shouldn't have thought Rudesheim capable of that, even for her. The man was a handsome image—no form of vice and excess that he hadn't been to the bottom of. But, as I said, her way is to take—not to give. She drove him mad."

"She disappeared from Monaco that night, and John arrived there the next morning. He mentioned that fact to me as we sat in the Hall of Venus, but I found that he knew nothing of the preceding circumstances, more than that she had been there. That old fellow gives me the shivers; he crawls on her trail like a tortoise—slow, but inevitable as the earth on its axis. Inevitable is the word!"

"I've had the same thought. He'll catch her at last."

"Well, whether John knew it or not, this surprising young woman had found another admirer during her stay at Monaco with Rudesheim—a Russian, Prince Orseff, I think his name is—you may know him or know of him; said to be enormously rich. The next news was that the prince was living in a palace of his in Russia with a new and very beautiful princess—princess of infatuation, at any rate—and John, he told me, had accordingly picked up his grip and started for St. Petersburg: 'just to be

on hand in case she wanted me,' he explained.

"He got there too late; they had gone to Paris. So here he was in Paris, making inquiries at the various hotels. And he thanked me for my company, and said he guessed he'd best be on his way. He rambled off, and I sat on the bench, staring at the Venus, who wasn't looking back at me, but was there just to be looked at. She and Judith may be sisters."

I shook my head, but made no other reply.

"I went out into the Rue de Rivoli again," Topham continued. "The shower had stopped. A very fine carriage, with three horses abreast, was drawn up at the curb in front of a jeweler-shop, driver and footman in Russian livery. In the carriage, alone, sat a woman—Judith. On the spur of the moment I stopped and spoke to her. She was three times more beautiful than ever."

"She feeds on their souls," said I. "What did you say to her?"

"I told her I'd just parted from her husband. She smiled, as if I'd said something amusing and answered, 'And I've never even met him yet.' Then a big, swaggering, mustachioed Cossack came swaggering out of the shop, glared at me, and got into the carriage—Orsoff, of course.

"I lifted my hat to Judith and they drove off. Next morning I read in the *Petit Journal* that he and the princess had gone to Vienna; and I have no doubt John was on the next train. That's my story."

"Euripides might have made a play of it. How long will Orsoff last?"

"Why may not some one of them kill her instead?"

"She will end in so such commonplace way."

"She has the physique to last a century. But I think John will be the death of her."

"Isn't it dinner-time?" I inquired.

We walked down the shadowed slopes to the inn. I asked him how long he would stay in London.

"Not long." Then he looked at me and said, "Can't we go back together?"

"I must go to Geneva first, to see Lyof Rudol. But I'm in no hurry about it. In the end, of course, I shall get around to Boston, and then we'll go to hear Paderewski."

He stepped in front of me and took both my hands in his.

"Martha, aren't you tired of all this? We are wasting our lives. Come with me."

"No, dear old Topham," I said. "It's the dark of the moon."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE CRIMSON DIAMOND.

TOPHAM sailed for home very soon after our Star-and-Garter day. It was very agreeable that year in and about London. I some times have spells of invincible indolence, and this was one of them. I had no other visible reason for staying in England; in fact, I knew I was looked for in Geneva; but I stayed.

I spent one day in Fred Leighton's gorgeous studio; he had fitted up a sort of Alhambra-room there, with a ceiling of rainbow stalactites, mosaic floor, with a circular gold-fish tank in the center, and walls like sunset skies after the first glow has faded. He showed me his dazzling little studies made in Algiers and Morocco, and we reclined in cool embrasures on silken cushions, he in fez and caftan, handsome as a sheik, trying to persuade me to pose for him as the Princess Badoura.

I told him I should need the inspiration of Prince Camaralzaman; and he put on a knowing air and said, "Ah, Tadema was more fortunate than I; there are no Camaralzamans in the Zoological Gardens." I asked him if he had seen the model of Dejanira? He had not, and said he thought the design artificial, and had supposed that Tadema made her up out of his own head.

I lounged in other studios of that day. Tadema's I did not revisit. All the time my dreams were haunted by Judith, and I knew that her prophecy was true—we should meet again. I longed for her, and also, at times, had a very different feeling.

I am accustomed, during my sojourns in Europe, to take my coffee and rolls in bed; Dora makes excellent coffee. On a certain September morning I told her, when she

entered with the tray, to pack our trunks; the fact was, I had an invitation from Charles Dilke to join a party for a week's shooting in Scotland. After Dora had gone out I took up the paper and studied the obituary column—not as desiring the death of persons I know, but there is something stimulating in possibilities. None of my acquaintance was mentioned.

After buttering my roll, I turned to the foreign news.

There was a telegraphed despatch from Moscow:

About three o'clock this afternoon a violent explosion startled the fashionable throng on the boulevard. Another assassination of some member of the imperial family was feared, and an immense crowd rapidly gathered about the scene. It transpired that the victim of the outrage was Prince Vladimir Orsoff, known as a powerful and aggressive member of the reactionary party. He was driving in his private carriage, when a bomb, thrown with good aim by some person as yet unknown, struck the vehicle on the right side. The coachman was killed, and the prince sustained the loss of both legs, and died an hour later in great agony.

He was the owner of large estates, and had the reputation of being a stern landlord. Later reports intimate that the prince's revenues had, of late, been seriously diminished by various extravagances: they were heavily mortgaged, and the valuable family collection of jewels had been disposed of, including the famous Orsoff diamond—a red stone of incalculable worth and rarity. It is rumored that he was on the point of journeying to Japan. It is also stated that a lady, who had been seen with the prince on other occasions, was with him in the carriage; but she disappeared in the confusion and excitement. A possible clue to her identity was furnished, just previous to the explosion, by an aged man, claiming to be a citizen of Boston, U. S. A., who had inquired after the lady at the United States Legation here, alleging that she was a relative of his. Being unable to obtain information, he left without giving his name or address. This incident is not deemed important, but the police are searching for him, as well as for the assassin; but, up to date, no arrests have been effected.

Though I like to linger over my morning toilet, I made it brief that morning, and before noon was in private conference with our minister to St. James, an old friend of mine. He could tell me nothing; but I could not doubt that the woman was Judith. The minister promised to send me private word of any developments.

Meanwhile, I notified Charles Dilke that I was prevented from joining his party. Two weeks of suspense and impatience passed; then I received from the legation a large, official envelope containing a sealed letter, postmarked Paris, in Judith's handwriting. It was dated from a private residence in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The letter was laconic, after her custom:

DEAR AUNTIE:

I must see you at once, so that we may have one of our nice, long chats together. Inquire for Madame Judith Saraband. Come prepared to stay; I want to consult with you about the future; we may decide to make a little trip together. There is a man I wish to meet.

Yours,
JUDITH.

I am more accustomed to be waited upon by people than to wait on them; nevertheless, I was possessed by an importunate desire to see Judith, intensified by suggestions in her letter, as appetite is sharpened by the sight of a feast. The letter was redolent of her; the past was ignored; she already wanted another man; her house, I surmised, had been a gift from the late prince. The letter had reached me by the first morning mail; by afternoon of the following day I was in Paris, leaving Dora in charge of my London apartment; she is a trustworthy and competent person.

The house in the Faubourg was a compact, symmetrical, beautiful little mansion, of a style now gone by; it stood on an airy corner, with a high-walled garden in the rear. Within, the decorations were of sound, old-fashioned taste, the furniture dainty. I was led up-stairs to an inner room, decorated in white and forget-me-not blue; and Judith, seated at a table with an enameled box in her lap, was clad in a simple white robe, with forget-me-nots in her hair.

She rose quickly, placing the box on the little table beside her, and came toward me light-footed and smiling, with open arms. My first impression of her was of maiden innocence as pure and happy as that of *Marguerite* in the jewel scene in "Faust." There was no scent of blood upon her garments, nor shadow of death in her eyes, the like of which I have never seen. They

were clear as a child's, and yet, far down in them, there was a demonic sparkle.

Drake, Rudesheim, Orsoff, and poor Constantino, too—and perhaps others—she had been the death of them all, yet was no more marked by those tragedies than she had been, years before, by the fate of the butterflies she was wont to tear to pieces.

But as her arms closed round me, and our lips met, I was conscious of a change in her too subtle to be visible to the eye, interior and deep. Something there was—I wouldn't call it tumult, but a stirring, an unrest, a lift and fire of the spirit—which I had never before felt in her. She had herself in hand, but the control was deliberate, not spontaneous.

She brought me to the window where she had been sitting, which looked out upon the garden. As we seated ourselves I noticed that the enameled box was filled with jewels.

"I was too lonesome without you, aunty," she said. "You would laugh at the adventures I had getting back here. I got across the border as Jack Rodney, an American student, with green spectacles, and my poor head all bandaged, on account of a disease of the scalp. My name didn't get into the papers, did it?" —

"No; nor John's; but he was after you."

"Yes, John and Sara; they're always behind me, but they never catch up; isn't it funny? I think Sara is getting fainter." She opened her dress and showed the birthmark on her breast; it was hardly discernible.

"Does this house belong to Mme. Saraband?" I asked.

She laughed. "Yes, Vladimir gave it me for my own—in case anything happened. He gave me all he had—I never asked him for anything. I was just looking over these jewels of his; this is the diamond."

By its slender gold chain she lifted out of the box a large stone of a peculiar carmine hue; I should have taken it for a ruby; it must have weighed a hundred carats, and was not cut as a brilliant, but was of irregular form, like the Kohinoor when first brought from India. I know of but one other red diamond in the world.

She dangled it in the light, causing crimson rays to flash from it.

"It has been in his family for hundreds of years," she said. "There was a legend that if any of them should give it away, they would die by violence."

"And yet he gave it to you?"

"Oh, Vladimir was a gambler, and a skeptic. And to gain his end he would risk or sacrifice anything. I don't care for his diamond; if it had been blue, I might have worn it; but it's the wrong color for my hair." She dropped it back into the box.

"And he was killed by the bomb?" remarked I. "Were you frightened?"

"I wasn't, but I believe Sara was. Except that it might interfere with my plans, I wish it might have killed her, too, poor old thing. But that's nonsense, of course. I don't have to depend on bombs. Aunty, would you accept the diamond from me? It seems just made for your style and complexion." She took it up again.

"It looks too much like crystallized blood for me," I said dryly; "besides, I'm not ready to have you die yet."

"I'm not an Orsoff," she said.

"But until Sara's mark is gone you're not immortal."

She mused a while. "I am immortal enough to frighten those men—Orsoff, Rudesheim, and such as they; they don't understand it; it cows them. They see me smiling at them, unprotected; but when they try to touch me their hands drop and they shake—as if I were the lightning that kills at a touch."

"Do they never want to kill you?"

"They all want to kill me," she replied: "in such men, loving and hating are the same. Rudesheim tried to do it that last night at Monaco."

She picked up from the little table beside her a dagger with a carved hilt; I hadn't noticed it among the other articles there. She drew it from its sheath; the blade was long and slender and very keen, triangular.

"This is Constantino's poniard that I told you of. I had gone to bed, but my chamber-door was unlocked—I never fastened it. It was a warm night; I was lying half uncovered, reading the feuilleton in a Paris newspaper. Of a sudden there stood Rude-

sheim in the doorway. It was the first time he had dared come in; so I knew he was desperate. '*Apres?*' I said, looking at him. The sight of my dishabille.—You can imagine a man like that." She smiled.

I nodded.

"I didn't move, any more than if he had been in form the beast that he was in spirit," she continued. "'Are you going?' I asked him. Money was what he most needed just then; he put aside the other thought for the moment and began to beg. 'You have half a million francs in your trunk; a thousand would save me,' and so on. I said, very quietly, '*Pas une centime, mon ami,*' and took up my newspaper again.

"He had been edging forward toward me, and now he reached out and caught hold of the poniard. He may have fancied, for an instant, that he was going to get all he wanted—me, and my money, both. Well, I laughed outright. Really, aunty, he looked absurd—like an actor in a melodrama. But very likely all murderers look vulgar when you see them."

"But you weren't exactly a mere spectator?"

"I felt as safe as if I were looking on at a play from a stage-box—and he was doing it so amateurishly! Constantino was a better actor—I fancy all Italians are."

"But what happened?"

"There the creature stood, paralyzed, impotent, goggling down at me, and actually slavering at the mouth like a dog. The point of the dagger was right over my breast; all he had to do was to bring his arm down.

"At last I said, 'But, Karl, you are stupid; you bore me. You are not going to rob me, *mon cher*, nor to ravish me, nor to kill me. You are going out to that little grove near the Casino, and there you will cut your throat; but do not take that poniard; it belonged to a friend of mine, and I have a sentiment about it. Put it back here on the table, and go; I wish to finish this story.'"

She returned the dagger, with which she had been half dramatizing the scene, to its sheath. "But is that all?" I asked.

"No doubt a man proved impotent is embarrassed. The best thing he could do was to obey me, and the next morning I found that was what he had done."

"Did he shoot himself?"

"Shooting was too good for him; he cut his throat, as I told him, and, my dear, what do you think he used? The bread-knife from the dining-table; it was one of the kind with the wavy edge. So then I came to Paris."

"And met Orsoff?"

"Yes, but not till afterward; first, I did something else. That was really interesting. Come, I'll show you."

She was on her feet, alert and eager, forgetting the dead men behind her. As I followed her into another room, I fell to thinking of what some seer had noted concerning eminent personality, or character—a certain undemonstrable force, expressing the same laws which control the universe, an incomputable agent, benumbing the resistance of lower natures—a natural power, simple as gravitation, and as irresistible. As she had related it, her incredible narrative was as credible as fire and ice.

The room which we now entered was not large, but its beautiful proportions disguised its dimensions. The floor was of inlaid, polished woods; the walls hung with tapestry. Several tall, narrow windows, screened below, admitted light above. At the head of the room was a deep embrasure—a bow-window, also partly screened. Here, on a pedestal, stood a tall object, swathed in semi-transparent gold tissue—a statue apparently a trifle more than half life-size.

"You remember what I told you about Rodin?" she said, turning upon me a face vivid with pleasure, like a girl about to reveal a fascinating secret. "I'd spent several days with him a year ago, but I didn't know how he was studying me: there was never such an artist—he looks through you to your marrow! I had a sort of understanding with him to come back, some time, and pose for him: he said, 'We shall see what the Plague looks like, *ma'mselle!*' But he said he must think about it first—he wasn't quite ready.

"Neither was I quite ready—I wanted to try myself a little! But when I came to Paris a week or so ago— Well, I was ready, and I drove to his studio the first

thing. I asked him if he had forgotten me. He smiled; he smiles like an Assyrian deity. No one ever smiled at me as he does; if he were not the king of artists, I should like him to be a man!

"He said, 'Come, we shall see whether I had forgotten!' There were several persons in the studio—models and visitors. He said, 'Run away, now, children! You have a vacation to-day!' and he herded them all out like sheep. I thought he was going to have me pose, then, and asked him if I should go to the dressing-room? He said, 'I am about to show you something which no one else has seen: and, if you wish, we shall afterward destroy it. It is an experiment which has never before been attempted—that is, not by us of to-day: perhaps the Japanese knew it; you have seen their mirrors of metal?' I knew what he meant—you look on one side and there is a reflection on the other—some queer secret. 'Is it possible that marble be made transparent—that is the problem!' he said. He went behind a screen in a corner of the studio, and wheeled out something on a stand, covered over as now."

She was standing with one hand grasping the tissue that veiled the figure.

"He had already modeled you, then?" I exclaimed.

"Aunty, whatever you guess, you would be wrong! It was magic—what he had done! The past, the future, the soul—there have been prophets who could reveal them, but never before an artist to bring them before your eyes! And even Rodin will never do it again—for there will never be another Judith!"

With that she stripped off the covering.

CHAPTER XXII.

RODIN'S INTERPRETATION.

WHAT I saw held me silent for some minutes, as the rush of a strong stream arrests reaction. At first I didn't understand what had been done, and afterward I was astounded by the mystery of it. I had been prepared for artistic mastery, for Rodin never disappoints, though he has often roused opposition or resentment, especially before his greatness had been appreciated; but this was an adventure into regions as yet unexplored in my experience.

I saw a figure floating in air, this appearance being obtained by the smoke of a holocaust below, on the billowings of which the figure was borne aloft. In her right hand she held high some object, partly draped in a diaphanous fabric which floated back as she drifted forward through the air: it had the appearance of a crown, but on a second look, it seemed, perhaps, to be a skull.

Her look, as she passed, was downward upon the earth which smoldered and withered beneath her. A faint, contemplative smile curved her lips and cheeks. Her features and form satisfied the canons of beauty, yet gave the impression of individuality.

Knowing Judith as intimately as I knew her, I was struck with the likeness; and yet there was something in the face, and even in the limbs and torso, that conveyed an idea beyond the actual woman—an effluence pregnant of spiritual significance, potent, imperious, but whether angelic or diabolic was questionable.

Indeed, I soon began to recognize that only incidentally had the artist aimed to portray grace and beauty, still less the mere physical idiosyncrasies of the model herself. He had set himself to reveal what the eye does not see—the secret meaning and purpose of the interior being, which we may sometimes divine in moments of special illumination and insight.

As my mind penetrated, as it were, the substance of the marble, I seemed to catch glimpses of what thought and imagination had suggested to me of Judith, when her material presence was not before me, to dazzle out of sight the profounder vision. The beauty became terrible, and the lines that flowed in such rich harmony were perverted into images monstrous and inhuman. Withal, the sense of ruthless power so dominated all else as to lend an awful dignity to the figure, as of fate, or of the laws of nature. She was above or below the sphere of mortal sympathies and emotions, and the more alien from them because her form was human.

Sculpture can seek expression through forms only; but the touch of Rodin was able to impart, through forms, the messages of color, thus controlling the gamut of nature; and with these at his disposal, to open the chambers of the invisible. His work was alive, and contained the potentialities of life on both sides of the veil. Nature exposes life to our senses on its lifeless side only; but art carries us onward into the soul.

My mind having reached this tension, became qualified for a further degree. But here, art itself was left behind, and the domain of what Judith had called "magic" was disclosed—a species of superhuman sleight-of-hand (as I suppose it must be termed), by conventional standards not legitimate, but in unique emergencies to be allowed—a Gothic audacity of imagination which grasped by force and sheer weight of power what could not be reached by artistic law.

The marble was of the finest grain and purity; and this sculptor's treatment of surfaces has never been rivaled, even by the ancient Greek. But here, he had employed this skill to produce an effect well nigh incredible even to the beholder. At first, indeed, I took the apparition for a sheer accident of light and shade. But immediately, another specter revealed itself; then others; till at last every part of the exquisite figure seemed alive with these masks of death! Its exterior loveliness disappeared in this infernal swarming up of the submerged. Visages of the dead everywhere!

On the voyage to Bombay, leaning over the steamer's rail while she lay at rest off the port of Aden one night, the sea oily smooth, undulating gently, like the breast of a slumbering deity, and black as Erebus, I saw in its depths what I mistook at first for a reflection of the moon, which hung overhead in conjunction with the planet Venus. But other moons appeared, some dimmer, some more bright, some almost vanishing in further profundities, silent, slowly drifting, palpitating, luminous with palest spiritual green. They seemed like faces of the drowned, rising, sinking, wandering in the subtle movements of the ocean tides, bearing voiceless witness to their unrecorded fate.

I was reminded of this phosphorescent host of the tropic ocean by what was now hinted, rather than portrayed, in Rodin's conception. By pressures of the modeling fingers too light to be detected save in creating the magic wrought by shadows and illuminations of incomparable delicacy, he had so modified the immaculate surface as to give it the seeming of a transparent medium, through which could be discerned dimmed human features, some all but obliterated, some more distinct for a moment, then fading out, or merging into others, as the light that fell upon the figure changed, or the spectator's position altered. The eyelids of some were closed: others stared blankly; others showed empty sockets only; there were bearded faces, and there were the smooth features of youth; all alike were stamped with the ghastliness of death. Yet they seemed insensibly to flow, to sink and rise, to waver from place to place, like those silent apparitions of the Indian sea; nor was it possible to recover a countenance once lost, but it was transmuted into others; and then, all at once, all would vanish together, the virgin marble revert to its unsullied nobility, and the form which had seemed composed of effigies of the damned enclosed beauty only.

This was the great artist's interpretation of Judith!

"It may have been worth while to create such a miracle," I said, "but it has no right to survive the drawing of a breath. There are secrets too appalling to endure telling, and art is desecrated in giving them shape!"

"But isn't it diabolically clever!" returned she, contemplating it with a strange delight. "It's a comfort to know—to have proof—that the eyes of a mortal man have seen me! Nakedness of the body is common, and generally vulgar; but this man has looked into heaven and hell!"

"We're not good or wicked enough to tolerate such things," I affirmed. "It should be smashed to pieces with a hammer, and the fragments burned up in a lime-kiln!"

"Are you sure you've seen it all?" she

asked after a pause. "Look at the face again—the face of the figure, I mean: is it a true likeness?"

She had, perhaps, lifted or lowered a trifle one of the window-screens in the embrasure: at all events, when I glanced again at the beautiful visage, it had undergone a change, though of such a nature as cannot be described. But it sent my thoughts far back into the early days when Sara Taylor (as she then was) and I were chums at school, and I had imagined her a sort of human cinder, whose gray nonentity originally had held some form splendid with the evil passion and glory of the legendary Lilith who seduced Adam before the coming of Eve.

But now the order was reversed, and within the lineaments of Judith I saw the face of Sara: the radiance and fascination of the former did but mask the latter's dull, inanimate vacuity! Sara the soul, and Judith the body!

I turned away with an unutterable repulsion.

"This passes all limits," I said. "I hate yourself for having seen it. I fervently wish this hour could be blotted out of memory!"

"I find nothing so easy as forgetting," she replied, restoring the veil over the figure; "but I love truth! Rodin told what he saw, and I respect him for it. It is like the fairy story of the prince visiting the princess in her enchanted tower: she had been lonesome there, and his winning through to the inaccessible place consoled her.

"None but you and he, aunty, have ever come there. Perhaps, when Sara's birthmark has entirely faded away, I shall become independent even of you and him."

We walked down the length of the tapestried room, and returned to the place whence we came: the sinister influence was abated in the changed environment.

"How should a creature so insignificant as Sara have power to hold you back?" I said.

"In herself she was insignificant," Judith answered; "but her generations, like every one's, go back to the beginnings of time."

This was a new view: human nature in the aggregate is a power indeed!

Judith did not reseat herself, but paced up and down like a creature imprisoned.

"Where is the best man in the world?" she exclaimed. "The strongest, purest, most unselfish: nothing less will content me—he is my test!"

"What would you do with him—marry him?"

"That's a droll notion," she said laughingly, after a moment: "would he marry Sara?"

"Would such a man know?"

"It's because he would know that I must meet him!"

"After all, Sara was never really alive."

"I have given her life!" said she—she was in an ambiguous mood, now fierce, now playful—"and you see what has come of it!" Her bosom swelled and subsided under her white dress, and she began to ascend, so to say, into a region unvisited in our intercourse.

I was put on my defense. When a deity of antiquity, after conversing with a mortal, was about to resume its superior form, this transfiguration was preceded by symptoms, benign or threatening, according as its source was divine or infernal. The little white room seemed to glow and vibrate, and I was enveloped in a new atmosphere, as if I were being absorbed into a being alien to my own, and perilous, though sweet.

It was a kind of intoxication. She drew me like a magnet, but I was beset with uneasiness, and resisted with all my might. She was penetrating to springs in me deeper than sex or law—opening herself to an intimacy which I was not prepared to accept. I saw her draw nearer, and felt her hands burn on my shoulders, and the radiance of her countenance and the allurement of her breath made my own eyelids quiver and wrought a delicious suffocation. I inhaled fire for a moment, and there was a dizzy spinning in my brain.

I grasped the arms of my chair, fearing to be rapt away into I knew not what. Every atom of my trained and tried spiritual strength seemed required to withdraw me from the vortex—to keep outside the

periphery of the impulse proceeding from her.

This was a glimpse of Judith in her power. It was well for me that my ancestress of three centuries before had taught me a number of tricks of self-protection known to few!

And yet I realized the next moment that there had been no purposed effort on Judith's part; she had not tried to overpower me; what I had felt had been merely an inadvertent display of her quality, as when an athlete stretches his thews and sinews in impersonal longing for an antagonist fit to cope with him. Had she consciously pitted herself against me I am not confident that my resistance would have prevailed.

But after a moment she turned from me and resumed her pacing up and down, intent on thoughts remote: she was inhaling deep breaths; she slipped the band from her hair and tossed the golden shower impatiently about her.

"Rodin was right!" she muttered to herself. "I feel them here!" and she pressed her hands against her bosom. "I'm wasting myself! Aunty," she said to me from the other side of the room, "you must help me, find me what I want! I've been playing with pygmies! I'm sick of well-behaved boys, and cowardly blackguards, and stupid tyrants and bullies! I need a giant or a god who can give me a struggle to the death!

"He must see me as Rodin did, and either purge me or die of me! He must wrestle with me as Jacob did with the angel, to decide whether this world shall be mine or his!" She clinched her white fists. "Am I Judith, or Sara?"

"I'll look over my book of addresses," said I, grinning through my teeth; "at this moment I don't recall any gods or giants among them."

She smiled doubtfully, and then laughed in her frank, girlish way.

"Oh, why weren't you a man!" she exclaimed, dancing up to me, and stooping to kiss me lightly on the forehead. "Then —then—" She did not finish.

That white ingénue dress of hers, which had seemed a mockery before, suited her well now. The storm and stress were gone by, for the time, and she was a nymph of nature again.

"I'll make a bargain with you, aunty," she said, sitting down and taking my hand between hers. "If you'll promise to find me what I need, I'll get a hammer from the concierge and smash that statue of the Plague all to smithereens!"

"That would be worth taking some trouble for!" I returned. "But I don't pretend to be a magician, to create what you want by a wave of the hand. And you're better equipped than I am to go hunting!"

"Ah, you're afraid I'll be too much for him!" said she. "You know perfectly well what I'm thinking of!"

"Nobody could ever know that!"

She drew up her chair close to mine, and nestled up to me like a child prepared to listen to a story.

"Tell me about Lyof Rudol!" she said.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LYOF RUDOL.

LATE on a September afternoon—it was a holiday of some sort—I walked alone to the water-front, to look once more upon the lake of history and poetry, lying between its mountain walls. It is now half a lifetime since I have visited the place, and though the lake must be unaltered, no doubt the human surroundings have undergone changes.

A massive bridge, in those days, spanned the river at the point where its swift blue stream rushed into the lake, with an impetus so vigorous that, for a long way out, the color of its waters was distinguishable from those which received them—a new birth into an ancient world. In calm hours, the sky was reflected in tints of varying beauty, and the mountains, their summits silvered with snow. Contemplating this scene, I used to wonder whether the gates of paradise could be more lovely—only, those gates must open into something lovelier yet; but there is in this world nothing to rival the Lake of Geneva.

The sound of chiming bells from towers of churches, far off or near, was charming the air as I approached the bridge. The popu-

lace, in the narrow streets, was taking its ease with the pleasant consciousness that holidays are no rarity in their country, and that enjoyment may be had without crowding or hurrying. As I passed at a leisurely gait from one street to another, the strolling groups and individuals became less frequent; there was probably some fiesta or other attraction in another region of the city.

I had been of late under some mental and emotional strain, and I needed the companionship of the lake to restore my equipoise. Moreover, I was on the verge of an adventure that promised to be momentous in the drama unfolding before me, and I wished for space to review what had passed, and to adjust myself to what was to come.

The sunlight had gone before I reached the bridge, but through the transparent dusk I observed, with disappointment, that three persons were leaning on the parapet at the very point where I had designed to pass an hour of solitary musing.

I slackened my steps. The figures had their backs turned toward me, and two of them wore black, flowing garments, descending from head to feet. It was not a priestly garb, however; it more resembled the burnoose of the Bedouins of the desert. I had once traveled for a week with one of the tribes along the seacoast of Arabia. Types of all nations may be encountered in Geneva, but I had never before happened to see the sons of Ishmael there.

The third figure, between the two others, was clad in grayish clothes, of a fashion not determinable in the decreasing light. The three appeared to be conversing earnestly. One of the Bedouins lifted himself erect, and made a sweeping, downward gesture with his right arm.

At that moment my attention was distracted by a little child who toddled into the roadway in front of an approaching vehicle; a woman sprang forward, caught it up in her arms, and regained the sidewalk. The episode had passed in a moment, but when I looked again toward the bridge the two black-robed figures had disappeared, and the man in gray leaned on the parapet alone. But for him, the bridge was vacant, and I speculated, in idle curiosity, as to how the Arabs had contrived to vanish. Had they vaulted over the parapet into the Rhone?

The serenity of the solitary gray figure forbade that hypothesis. He leaned his head upon his hand, and seemed immersed in tranquil meditation. And I had not made half a dozen steps forward, when I recognized him; it was Lyof Rudol!

Of all others, he was the man I most desired to see and speak with; he would serve better than solitude for my twilight purposes. I had indeed come to Geneva on an errand in which he would be concerned; but I hadn't intended to seek him out for some days. I now felt that the present encounter couldn't have been more opportune. I didn't know what I should say to him, ask of him, or hear from him; but I had several times discovered that the mere presence of this man could affect the attitude of my mind and feelings; as when one passes suddenly from mean surroundings into contact with nature in her nobler phases—only that his influence was more poignant.

I drew near softly, and had rested my arms on the parapet beside him before I spoke.

"I'm glad you can take your ease on a holiday, like the rest of us," I said. "I don't like to associate you with the clicking of your sewing-machine!"

"Ah, well met, Miss Klemm!" he said, straightening himself and smiling with pleasure. "The lake is so beautiful this evening that I might have known you were not far off!"

Rudol's compliments are not like other people's; they make you feel that he discerned something in you better than you had suspected.

"Even here, I suppose you seldom find seclusion?" I was curious about those Bedouins.

"You were the first to find me; I could say you brought me here: for, till you spoke, I was"—he stretched out an arm—"far, far away!"

He had pointed toward the east; but that might have been an accident. I hazarded a suggestion, however. "Among the tents of the wanderers?"

"I should, perhaps, myself be more of a wanderer," he said after a pause. "I have been here—I don't know how long—many years, no doubt. To be too long in one place leads to blindness and solitude; you no longer see what is around you, and you speak and think in formulas, which are less fruitful than silence.

"Change your horizon often, or it shuts you in like a hermit's cell! Time and space are magic talismans given to us stupid children, to help us out of our ruts and holes. But if we fail to use them, they bury us deeper!"

"Why should you travel about the world, Rudol, when the world travels here to meet you? No globe-trotter has a visiting list larger than yours; you are wiser than the Wandering Jew, for you sit still and the world turns all its sides to you. Constantinople and Paris, London and Copenhagen, Madras, and even Boston, all journey to that little tailor-shop of yours, and you give them fresh suits for their minds, if not for the backs. Are you still at the same place, by the way?"

He was shaking his head and laughing. "The world is round, and I have legs! I am not a tree or a rock, but a man. Besides, trees are cut into lumber and exported, and rocks go forth and become cities. I have Tatar ancestors; they were wanderers, and they conquered the earth! My little shop? Yes, it is still there, and I go on making the coats and trousers, which fit everybody because they fit nobody.

"But I will tell you my ambition. It is to find a customer—a man or a woman, no matter—who has hitherto lived naked, because it had been impossible to fashion a garment to fit him. All the famous tailors, one after another, had made the attempt, but in vain! This unfortunate person is much distressed, for her predicament (it may really be a woman) renders her an outcast, and perhaps endangers the stability of the social régime! She is at war with her fellow creatures, and is perhaps prone to think that she was designed to dwell in some other planet, where flesh and bones are the only wear; and, to be at peace, either she must exterminate us, or we her!

"Well, in that emergency, here come I with my scissors—snip-snip—and my sewing-machine—tick-tick—and to work I go! Now behold her fitted to perfection and reconciled to mankind! And I die content, for at last I have done something!"

"You have made the parable—now interpret it!"

But he only laughed in a shy way he had, and rubbed his hand through his bushy beard, and wouldn't, or couldn't, explain his new chapter of *Sartor Resartus*.

Rudol, transparent as water, was full of mysteries. Who were those personages who had conversed with him but now? They had vanished like ghosts at cock-crow, and he had seemed to deny all knowledge of them. Again, this parable of his; how apt an allusion to Judith, whom he had never seen or heard of! In the language of symbol, "clothes," I believe, stand for doctrine.

I have said, haven't I, that his physiognomy was Socratic—spiritual beauty shining through physical ugliness. Early in his career the fiend Apollyon and the angel Michael had met in deadly grapple, and the fiend had been overthrown, and Rudol, thenceforth, in exile, poverty, humility and self-denial, had striven to serve and enlighten his fellow men.

But the light of his taper had so shone round the world that pilgrims had come to him for counsel from the ends of the earth. This characteristic miracle of selfless goodness is formulated in current moral philosophies, and is familiar on our tongues if not in our hearts.

Such at least was my reading of Rudol—he never expounded or exploited himself. In that little tailor-shop of his, in an obscure quarter of the city, he had dwelt for more than twoscore years, making rude garments for the needy, doctoring them, composing their quarrels, unraveling their perplexities, shielding them from oppression. That was all!

Secret service police of foreign countries had investigated him as a possible source of revolutionary propaganda; no vestige of offense had been found. The man was a good citizen, rendering unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and inculcating the like on others. No grand, impersonal scheme of salvation emanated from him, but he treated

such particular cases as his daily walk discovered, and seemed to think that succoring a nameless beggar in a slum might aid the regeneration of mankind as much as the overthrow of kingdoms or the crusades of nations. Good, in his belief, possessed a mystic, immeasurable power.

I commonly follow my impulses, good, bad, or indifferent. Once in a while I have done harm; that, I think, is a candid confession, passing over certain private and personal qualities which, like Byron's club-foot, are not of public concern. But from our first meeting Rudol had seemed to me unique. I reverenced him, and had served him, sometimes, with zeal and joy, and would have attempted anything he asked me, almost. But I had understood his goodness no more than I did the evil of Judith.

Now, I was bringing these two together —not, I am sure, plotting mischief to either, but feeling myself the instrument of a long-evolving fate. Good and evil are inherent in human nature, and each seems necessary to the functioning of the other. They can't be kept apart, and unless you assume—as I do not—a mindless universe, their conflict must issue in benefit of some sort.

As best I could, I had depicted Rudol to Judith. So swift and intelligent had been her reception that she had seemed less to learn than to remember—she even added suggestions to my portrait which enhanced its life and substance, as one lover divines another before the meeting.

Her impatience for the encounter was feverish; it was for this that she had been sent into the world; all that had preceded —all else whatever—had been mere marking time! And the day before we left Paris, she had led me again to that tapestried room, and showed me a heap of marble chips on the floor—all that was left of Rodin's statue! Obviously, she was in earnest!

We had rented a double apartment in the residential section of the city. She didn't wish me to leave her, but she desired to be independent. She approached the crisis with a sort of solemn mirth, as one fancies aspirants for knighthood in round-table days devoutly preparing for the ceremony.

Her faith in the decisiveness of the coming ordeal surprised me. Not that she vaunted herself victorious beforehand, but she was breathlessly eager for the battle. On that hinged her existence, and had she been certified of defeat she would have engaged in it none the less ardently. It was the verdict that she sought, fall it which way it might! "I must know, aunty," she once said to me, "whether I'm a reality, or nothing!"

On the other side, hadn't Rudol foreshadowed in his parable the conviction that some vital experience awaited him? He had come to the end of his present phase, and felt his feet on the threshold of another and a greater. Fate had whispered in his ear as in hers!

But when I asked myself on what grounds was the verdict to be decided, I seemed facing an absurdity! Was it thinkable that she should corrupt Rudol, or he convert her? The idea was banal, and either result would be personal and therefore trivial. One more apostle seduced, or one more Magdalen rescued, and the evening and the morning would be another day! Wasn't this whole enterprise a transcendental, wild-goose chase?

Meanwhile, so far as I could probe my own mind, I sympathized with both sides. My reverence for Rudol and my devotion to him were reasonable enough and need no explanation; my attachment to Judith doubtless did me less credit, and I have never been able to explain it. Both feelings were perhaps spontaneous echoes in me to appeals from their opposing natures. One doesn't argue about such things—they exist.

"Where will you go to seek this naked outcast?" I inquired, in continuation of my conversation with the exile.

"If I am to find her, it is all the same; perhaps round the corner," he replied; but there was no flippancy in his tone. The truth is, I suppose, that persons who have finally surrendered all personal interests, become persuaded that God takes the place of their initiative and leads them to what has been divinely appointed; it is the "dæmon" of Socrates; the "inner voice" of re-

ligious enthusiasts. In measure as they abdicate themselves, God takes their place.

This is the faith that moves mountains, and, right or wrong, such persons have to be reckoned with. Ordinary considerations don't hinder them.

"A friend of mine is here to meet you," I said. "It may be for her that the well-fitting dress is destined. Will you receive her?"

The suggestion produced a singular effect upon him. His hands, which were resting on the parapet of the bridge, tightened their grip upon it convulsively, and a thrill seemed to run through his body. A man suddenly ordered to leap from a precipice into the sea might have manifested a like emotion.

Yet there had been no foreboding in my voice or bearing. His eyes met mine, and the wonderful light that sometimes shone from them softened and transfigured his aspect.

"When is it to be?" he asked, in a soft, tremulous tone.

"Will to-morrow do?"

"Will you bring her to sup with me?" he rejoined.

"Yes," said I. He clasped his hands, and gazed over toward the high mountains. He seemed to be praying, and I deemed it proper to withdraw.

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

A Matter of Discipline

by Albert William Stone

THE three mountain-climbers — two men and a girl — had paused at the spring to slake their thirst. The spring gushed from the side of a rock, the water tumbling hurriedly over itself and coming to rest in a stone-lined pool, ten feet below. It was on the bank of this pool that the trio stood, the Colorado plains spread at their backs like a vast, green-splotched bowl with a blue rim. Immediately below them a narrow gulch fell away to the distant valley, the pines and cedars thrusting uneven spires skyward as if in mute supplication to their sisters above.

The taller of the men, a magnificent specimen of athlete, raised his blond head and scrutinized the distant peak. Across the side of Bald Mountain, so far that it resembled a yellow slash, crawled the shelf-like automobile road spiraling its way to the summit.

"Let's take the short cut," the blond man suggested. "We can make it in two-thirds the time it 'll take us to travel by the trail."

"Isn't it rather steep?" inquired the girl, her white teeth flashing from between her parted, cherry-red lips. Her khaki skirt

fitted trimly over her hips and her wavy, brown hair escaped in mischievous tendrils from beneath the jaunty cloth hat she wore.

"That's one reason I'd like to tackle it. Try out our climbing muscles." The big man turned to his smaller male companion. "How about it, Gordon?"

The little man's gray eyes were set in a face the skin of which was drawn over sharply protruding cheek and jaw bones. He wore spectacles, through which his eyes peered shrewdly.

"Not me," he said with finality. "I prefer to stick with the trail."

He was adjusting his belt and taking a firmer grip on his stick. The blond youth laughed.

"A little chap like you ought to make it all right," he remarked, his voice tinged with sarcasm. "Now, I—"

"I'll go by the trail," interrupted Gordon decisively. "We'll meet you at the wall above the hairpin curve." He peered near-sightedly at the girl. "Shall we start, Miss Wayne?"

"I believe I'll take the short cut," she decided after a moment's hesitation. "It looks—interesting."

"Very well." Gordon's small face, leathery in its expression of disapproval, puckered into a thousand wrinkles. Without another word he set off, his stick rising and falling above his head like a perpendicular piston-rod. In a moment a bend in the trail hid him from sight.

"I hope he feels better," remarked the youth resentfully. "Ready?"

"Yes."

"Then let's go."

For the first few rods of the climb they conversed. Then the going became so difficult that all their breath was required for purposes of locomotion. The mountain rose before them with almost incredible precipitancy. What at a distance appeared to be a smooth, grassy stretch of hillside became, upon closer intimacy, a way fraught with such impedimenta as fragments of loose rock, treacherously concealed by bunches of coarse grass and soap weed. Outcroppings of solid granite supplied occasional footholds and places of temporary, breath-catching rest.

It was nearly an hour before they crawled between the two iron cables which formed the safety fence at the edge of the shelflike automobile road, and crossed to the opposite bank to rest.

"Whew!" exclaimed the youth, wiping his heated face with his pocket-handkerchief. "That *was* a climb!"

The girl agreed with him. The junction of the trail with the road was at a point a quarter of a mile farther down. Gordon was not in sight.

"Probably stopped to examine some new kind of bug," remarked the man. "He's a queer chap. How did you happen to get acquainted with him?"

The girl's supple form inclined against the granite wall at her back, and her blue eyes were on the wonderful panorama spread out below them. After a pause she replied:

"I met him at the Falls—in the hotel."

"And he's been hanging around you ever since."

"Mr. Fullerton!"

The youth's expression indicated a quick regret. "That *was* rather caddish," he admitted. "I'm sorry, and I take it back."

"You didn't mean it, then?" she queried demurely.

"At the instant I suppose I did."

"What have you against Mr. Gordon?"

Her blue eyes were on him, and the red mounted to the roots of his hair.

"Nothing, except that he seems to be in love with you."

"And is that such a crime?" Her smile was roguish.

"Perhaps not. But I happen to be in love with you myself, you know. You don't expect a man in love to be exactly cordial toward a rival, do you?"

"How do you know he is a rival?"

"I know I can't get your promise to marry me," returned Fullerton sulkily. "And I don't feel very hilarious when I see you smiling on somebody else all the time, even if it is a dried-up, bug-hunting old fossil."

"I'm afraid you're spoiled, Jack," she told him, her smile a mixture of reproof and indulgence. "You've always had everything you wanted, haven't you? And

now, because you think you want me, you begin to sulk the instant you find that I'm not to be had for the asking. Shame on you!"

She shook her finger at him and laughed.

"I think I've done remarkably well in holding my temper down," he retorted. "When a fellow is hopelessly, raving, insanely crazy about a girl—"

"My, what a formidable array of adjectives and adverbs!" she giggled.

"And the girl persists in turning him down for the society of a ninety-pound relic who needs a magnifying-glass to see his own breakfast, and whose chief excitement is exploring the insides of a potato-bug—"

"It isn't!" she exclaimed indignantly. "Mr. Gordon is a naturalist. Bugs are only—is only—one of his studies."

"I know," said Fullerton bitterly. "He was probably born in some public library and began to study about bugs before he was out of kilts. I'll bet he couldn't have told a football from a referee's whistle, in college. He's the sort that would sign a petition to have the baseball diamond plowed up and planted to buckwheat, on the theory that there might be a surplus of maple-syrup otherwise."

The girl eyed him speculatively.

"You're spoiled," she repeated without emotion. "What if I don't happen to marry you? Will the world come to an end?"

"It will for me."

"I really believe you think it would!" she exclaimed. "With everything in the world to be thankful for, you think you've got to have the one thing you happen to want, or you're going to cry. Like a big baby."

He opened his mouth for protest, but her upraised hand stayed him.

"That's just the trouble," she continued. "You were born with a gold spoon in your mouth—"

"That's old stuff!"

"And you've always had more money to spend than was good for you. You're good looking—"

"Thank you," he interposed.

"Please don't interrupt. I'm not trying to flatter you. You're good looking, big and strong, and you've got the habit of looking down on other men not so fortunate as you. It isn't fair to make sarcastic remarks about Mr. Gordon, for instance, just because he isn't built like a steam-roller, and because he isn't interested in the same things as you."

"But he is," declared the youth with heat. "That's what I'm kicking about. Why should he want a girl like you, anyway?"

"I'm sure I can't imagine," she said icily.

"Well, you aren't his style. He can't appreciate feminine perfection, I tell you. To him you're just another interesting specimen. As soon as he's explored your mind to his heart's content he'll drop you and take up something else. He isn't capable of loving you—as I am." The big man's eyes were like those of a dog as he gazed hungrily at her. "You know he isn't, Sylvia."

The object of their conversation just then came in sight around the bend, the long stick protruding above his head, his small figure bent over with the exertion of negotiating the grade. His spectacles flashed in the sunlight. The girl stood erect suddenly.

"It isn't right to talk about him like this," she exclaimed. "He wouldn't do it about you."

"I'm not saying a word against his character," pleaded Fullerton. "I don't suppose he can help it because he is a sort of a grub instead of a real man. I'm just pointing out to you that he isn't cut out for a husband to a girl like you."

"And you are, I suppose?"

The red mounted to his hair again.

"At least I'm red-blooded and human. I'm alive, and I'm young. You owe it to yourself to marry a young man, don't you? You're young yourself. Gordon is old—"

"He's only forty-five."

"Well, that's old—for you."

Gordon's figure was drawing closer. The girl eyed it dreamily.

"You talk as if I had already accepted Mr. Gordon," she said. "For all you know, he hasn't even proposed. You don't know that he even intends to."

"I'm not blind," he rejoined.

"Listen, Mr. Fullerton." Her tone had resumed the primness which at times characterized it when she was with him. "This is positively silly. If you really wanted me, you'd do something to prove it."

"What?" he demanded blankly.

"Oh, anything!" Her exasperation was patent. "Something that might be a little bit hard for you, for a change."

There was no time to say more. Mr. Gordon was upon them. He came to a stop before the granite wall and pushed his cap to the back of his head, exposing a generous bald spot. There was no perspiration on his forehead and he did not appear to be short of breath.

"Miss Wayne," he said peremptorily, "I have decided to take the short cut between here and the crest. You may accompany me, if you like."

The girl's face registered a lively surprise at the challenge. Fullerton, who had prepared to resume the climb by way of the road, stared.

"Come off," he said inelegantly. "Nobody ever climbs that, and you ought to know it."

Gordon squinted at the distant crest, shouldering its arrogant way into the sky. "I see no reason why it shouldn't be attempted," he said. "It doesn't look dangerous."

"It may not look it, but—why, confound it, man, don't you know that half a dozen fools have been killed trying that climb?" exploded Fullerton. "I won't allow Sylvia—Miss Wayne—to take such a risk."

The girl's mouth set in a straight line.

"Indeed!" she remarked with scorn. "I shall go with Mr. Gordon."

"Very good," approved the little man, wrinkling up his leathery countenance into something intended for a smile, but which looked to Fullerton more like a triumphant grimace. "Are you coming, Mr. Fullerton?"

"You haven't any more chance of climbing the crest from this side than an elephant!" almost shouted the youth. "It's a criminal risk, I tell you."

But the girl was already scrambling up the embankment at one end of the wall, the dirt and stones descending in a shower from under her thick-soled shoes. Gordon, his ridiculously long stick firmly grasped in his right hand, was just behind her. The baffled young giant pulled down his cap and gave his belt a vicious yank.

"The little runt couldn't climb a staircase in an old woman's home," he muttered. "I suppose I'll have to go along to be on hand when he gets stuck. Confound a contrary woman, anyhow!"

The crest of Bald Mountain is over fourteen thousand feet above sea-level, which in this latitude means three thousand feet above timber-line.

Upon the summit there is no hint of vegetation. Even the stunted cedars have given place to jagged rocks and huge, immovable boulders. Except on the clearest days the peak is swathed in a swirl of vapor, which curls and rushes in and out of the rocks with incredible rapidity, bringing with it a chill that strikes through the thickest clothing.

Far below, like reflections in limpid water, float bits of sun-flecked cloud with surfaces as chaste as newly fallen snow. On certain occasions the bits of cloud multiply and rush together, forming a thick, impenetrable blanket of dazzling whiteness through which leap flashes discernible only by reason of their swiftness. At these times it is raining below; the underside of the cloud carpet is velvety black, and the leaping lightning creates a majestic illumination.

The crest is comparatively easy of access if approached from the rear. There appears a gigantic slash in the solid granite, with a steeply inclined floor. One may climb this floor without danger; but the front of the rock is a stark wall, so forbiddingly sheer that even the expert mountain sheep seldom attempt to negotiate it. Here and there appear outcroppings of rock, to be sure; they protrude at irregular intervals and furnish precarious foot and hand holds. The history of Bald Mountain reveals that a few climbers, who had previously achieved fame in the Alps, have succeeded in reaching the top by way of the wall. The same history says that others failed—and died.

It was to this well-nigh impossible undertaking that the girl and the little man had committed themselves. The base of the

cliff was some distance up the mountain from the automobile road, and for three-quarters of an hour the couple negotiated the rock-strewn rise at a necessarily leisurely pace. Fullerton remained far enough behind them to be out of earshot, although he could discern the murmur of their voices as they conversed. Occasionally their heads came too close together for his peace of mind, and he relieved his feelings with a soulful expletive.

Presently the two climbers reached the base of the cliff. Fullerton, sulkily determined to remain by himself, came to a rest three hundred feet to the right. Gordon and the girl were gazing upward, as if gaging the difficulties ahead; Fullerton grinned maliciously as he viewed the almost unbroken expanse of rock. An active climber might negotiate it for perhaps fifty feet, he knew, without danger.

It was the girl who took the lead, finally. With a quick movement she sprang upward, catching the edge of a "scale" with the tips of her fingers and hanging suspended for the fraction of a moment. Then her lithe figure was drawn upward by sheer muscular strength, and her feet rested on the narrow ledge rock.

"Come on, Mr. Gordon!" she called, laughing. "The air is fine up here."

The little man threw aside his stick and began to climb, gingerly and with obvious caution. Fullerton's teeth were exposed as he watched, his upper lip drawn back. The pair above continued to climb from ledge to ledge. Presently Fullerton was aware that they had progressed considerably beyond the fifty-foot danger-line he had marked out for them. He seated himself stubbornly on a boulder and prepared to wait.

"They won't get far," he assured himself.

The bits of fleecy cloud floated below him, casting their tiny shadows on the floor of the valley. Now and then Fullerton, as he watched idly, noticed two of them approach each other and join edges. Occasionally they parted company after a moment, their individual boundary-lines changed by the contact. With others the union remained; presently the watching youth was aware that a fleecy lace-work was forming, through which the floor of the valley could be seen only in glimpses.

A chill wind struck him, causing an involuntary shiver in spite of the power of the sun. He started and came out of his abstraction with a jerk.

"Looks like a storm brewing down there," he said aloud. "I wonder—"

His eyes ranged the face of the rock above, but he found it necessary to resort to his binoculars before he could locate the climbers. When the lenses finally sought them out the youth gave a startled exclamation.

"Of all the fools!" he exclaimed, thrusting the glasses back into their case and preparing to move. "If those clouds take it into their heads to roll up this way—"

He did not finish the sentence, but began rapidly to mount from ledge to ledge, his big body swaying powerfully as he pulled and propelled himself upward. Occasionally he paused and scrutinized the cloud formation below. The lace work had now become a solid, dazzling mass of white, and the valley could no longer be seen. By the occasional, faintly discernible flashes that leaped through the mass Fullerton knew that the lightning was already beginning to play against the velvety-black underside of the cloud carpet. He redoubled his efforts.

Rapidly as he climbed, however, the movement of the white mass was faster. Great sections of it, like huge bales of cotton, began to roll up the slope. The uneven spires of the pines and cedars thrust themselves supplicatingly skyward and were swallowed up as in a flood. Gusts of wind, cold as drafts from an ice cavern, struck the man's broad back with chilling force.

He pulled himself over the edge of an unusually broad ledge of rock, finally, and found himself confronting the gaping entrance to a shallow hollow in the solid granite. It would afford a scant shelter from the driving rain that he knew would soon be upon him—but what about the couple somewhere above him?

He placed his hands to his mouth and shouted.

During the ascent the girl remained in the lead. Her agility and grace were marked as she swung from shelf to shelf,

her bare fingers gripping the edges of the rough rock, her body swaying lithely as she hung suspended from time to time. Despite the rather extraordinary strain upon her lungs she found breath to indulge in an intermittent fire of comment, to which her companion replied but seldom.

Once they came to a particularly generous ledge of rock, and by common instinct paused to survey the panorama below them. They sat with their feet dangling over the edge. The girl's face displayed an absorption in the scene almost bordering upon rapture; that of the man was inscrutable.

"How much farther do you think it is, Mr. Gordon?"

"Far enough," he answered. "Perhaps we have gone as far as we ought. You are not used to this--"

"I am as used to it as you are," she retorted with spirit.

"But Mr. Fullerton will be somewhat--er--disturbed."

"What if he is?" she laughed. "When he assumes that proprietary air with me he simply drives me to do the very thing he forbids."

A small lizard, common at these altitudes, at that moment darted along the ledge at Gordon's side. The lizard was quick; but not quicker than the hand of the man, which closed over the small body like a gentle vise.

"Ah!" exclaimed Gordon, holding up the squirming reptile and peering at it through his spectacles. "A perfect specimen of the genus *Lacerta*. A saurian—"

"Oh, put it down!" almost screamed the girl, shuddering. "It 'll bite you!"

The man smiled a leathery smile. "They don't bite," he informed her. "And if they did, the bite would be harmless."

His professional satisfaction as he examined the little animal was patent. He fumbled in the side pocket of his coat and drew forth a small, folding microscope, through which he squinted at his captive.

"Oviparous," he soliloquized aloud, as if rehearsing an oft-repeated lesson. "Four distinct limbs. Toes clawed, body elongated, covered with granular scales. Ribs distinct, mobile and with a visible sternum—"

"Has it got eyes, and a mouth?" inquired the girl.

"Eyes?" repeated Gordon blankly. "A mouth?"

"Yes—and feet. Are you sure it's got all those things?"

"Why, certainly."

"Then throw the nasty thing away!" she commanded. Her tone was obviously nervous.

"But I don't want to throw it away! It's a perfect specimen—"

"Throw it away!" she repeated hysterically. "Mr. Fullerton is right—you're just a grub! Ugh!" she shuddered. "I wouldn't marry you—"

In his astonishment Gordon permitted the lizard to fall to the surface of the ledge, where it quickly scampered out of sight.

"You wouldn't marry me!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean?"

She smiled in relief at the lizard's precipitate departure. "Please forgive me," she said. "Lizards and snakes make me fairly frantic. I didn't realize what I was saying."

Gordon snapped the microscope shut and replaced it in his pocket. His gray eyes were very shrewd behind the lenses of his spectacles.

"I thought that young man glared at me with extraordinary ferocity a while ago," he said. "Perhaps you had been discussing me?"

"Why, not exactly," she returned, her embarrassment increasing. "Shall we start—"

"Am I to infer that you joined me on this little expedition for the purpose of disturbing Mr. Fullerton's mind?" insisted Gordon. Miss Wayne's face flamed.

"What Mr. Fullerton and I discuss between ourselves cannot possibly be of any consequence to any one else," she asserted.

"Pardon me," Gordon said. His tone was apologetic but stubborn. "I must be set right in this matter, my dear young woman."

"Mr. Fullerton thinks he is in love with me," she explained with resignation. "Sometimes—just to tease him—"

"You permit him to infer that he has a rival in me. Is that it?"

She nodded, and Gordon pursed his lips.

"He seems to be a very worthy young man," he said musingly. "Wealthy, I believe. Blessed with rather more than the average allotment of personal pulchritude and bodily symmetry. Athletic, no bad habits—"

"Yes, he has, too!" she exclaimed. "He has the very bad habit of thinking that he must have everything he wants. And he's got to learn differently."

"I see." Gordon gazed abstractedly down at the white cloud carpet. "Disciplined, eh? Well—"

He was interrupted by a hail. Looking downward he beheld Fullerton, fifty feet below, with hands cupped to his mouth.

"Hello!" Gordon called. "What's the matter?"

"Come on down—quick!" shouted Fullerton. "Don't you see that storm coming? Hurry!"

The little man hesitated an instant before replying. Then:

"I can't!" he cried. "You'll have to come up here and help us!"

The girl's startled eyes were on him.

"Do you mean it?" she demanded.

"Yes," he replied, a distinct quaver in his voice. "I haven't dared to tell you, Miss Wayne; but we are where we can go neither up nor down."

Her face paled, and her eyes darted about in momentary frantic helplessness. Then she steadied herself.

"I am going down," she announced.

At Gordon's confession of impotency Fullerton had sprung quickly to a ledge directly beneath the pair. A distance of half a hundred feet separated them, and the roar of the storm below could plainly be heard. With powerful swings of his big body he scrambled up the face of the cliff until his feet rested on the ledge of rock immediately under that upon which Gordon and the girl were standing.

"All right," he called, striving to keep the fear out of his voice. "Hurry, please!"

He was holding his arms upward. Gordon, stooping gingerly, thrust one of his thin shanks over the edge. Fullerton struck it aside.

"I'll take Miss Wayne first," he said. "Come on, Sylvia."

The girl had already lowered one foot over the edge. Fullerton grasped it.

"Just let yourself go," he commanded. "I can hold you."

"Are you sure?" her voice came down to him from over the edge of the ledge. "Two of us might overbalance."

"I can hold you," he repeated. "Come on."

With superb strength the youth braced himself sidewise against the wall and eased her tense body to his own foot-rest. For an instant she leaned against him, breathing hard. Then, without a word, she dropped to the ledge below, where the footing was comparatively secure.

Fullerton looked up at Gordon, whose trepidation did not appear noticably to have been lessened by the successful rescue of the girl. He was clinging to the face of the cliff, his abdomen pressed flat to the rock, and was looking down in palpable terror.

"Come on," commanded the youth.

"Do you think it safe?" quavered the little man.

"Of course. There isn't a chance that you'll fall. Just keep up your nerve, old man. Come on!"

Again the thin shank came over the edge, and was grasped firmly in the hand of Fullerton. In a moment his light body had been seized and lowered to safety. The rescuer scrambled down, breathing hard. The girl had already reached the shelter of the hollow in the cliff and was peering up at them. Fullerton was prepared to aid Gordon in the descent; but the little man was lowering himself from ledge to ledge with a rapidity born of fear, apparently.

Just as they reached the ledge upon which the cave opened Gordon made a futile grab at something which darted between his fingers.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Another specimen of—"

At that instant they were engulfed in a flying swirl of vapor which drenched them as effectually as though they had been dropped into a pool of water. The trio felt their way back into the cave and watched the most spectacular play of the elements any of them had ever seen. It lasted, as

most mountain storms last, less than fifteen minutes.

The trio had been tramping for an hour through dense mountain darkness when the twinkling lights ahead and below them signaled their approach to the hotel at the falls.

The carpet of pine needles with which the way was strewn was sodden with the deluge that had a short time before descended upon it. The trees still dripped water; the wayfarers were soaked to the skin.

Gordon was ahead, a position he had maintained ever since their departure from the cave in the cliff, two hours before. During the return tramp he had been silent. His silence had been shared by his companions; but Fullerton and the girl had established a communication between themselves, nevertheless. It was negotiated solely through the medium of sundry hand-pressures.

At sight of the twinkling lights Gordon paused suddenly. Overhead the sky was dotted with the wonderful exhibition of stars seen only in the high altitudes. Gordon peered up into the face of Fullerton, who could just distinguish the faint gleam of the spectacles. The three had come to a full stop.

"Young man," said Gordon hesitatingly, "I want to thank you."

"That's all right," returned Fullerton with a visible touch of impatience. But Gordon still hesitated. He turned to the girl.

"Few young men are able to refrain from telling a coward what they think of him," he said. "Mr. Fullerton has probably exercised a commendable self-restraint to-day, under rather—er—trying circumstances. I—"

Fullerton placed his big hand on the other's shoulder.

"Forget it," he said. "None of us is responsible for his appearance or the way he's built, is he?"

The little man smiled in the dim light of the stars.

"A philosophical truth, my friend, despite the crudity of language with which you have clothed it," he said. "Nevertheless, I have a certain pride, foolish as it may be. It is because of this pride, largely, that I am going to introduce you to a friend whom I expect to find waiting for me at the hotel."

As they entered the rustic, brilliantly lighted lobby of the mountain inn a tall, powerfully built man rose from a rocker by the blazing fireplace and advanced upon Gordon, face beaming and hand outstretched. The stranger was clad in correct mountain-climbing habiliments, worn from long use.

"Ah, Gordon!" he exclaimed. "It's good to see you again." He stepped back and surveyed the rain-soaked clothing of the little man. "Hanged if you don't look just as you did the night we got back from that trip up the Matterhorn, three years ago. Have you—"

"Meet my friends, Miss Wayne and Mr. Fullerton," interrupted Gordon hastily. "This is Mr. Singleton."

"Just a minute, Mr. Singleton," said Fullerton as he acknowledged the introduction. "Is Mr. Gordon, by any chance, the Lysander Gordon who led that party up the Matterhorn three years ago—"

"And won the Carnegie hero medal for rescuing us all from that avalanche; yes, sir," said Mr. Singleton, staring his astonishment. "The most resourceful man, I may say, that I have had the pleasure of meeting." He turned to Gordon. "Are we going to climb to the crest to-morrow?" he demanded.

"We certainly are," said Gordon. "I've just been waiting for you to make the start."

"And I felt sorry for him because I thought he was a coward," Fullerton whispered as he watched the two veterans walk away, conversing animatedly. "Did you ever see a bigger fool?"

"That's why I'm going to let you marry me—if you still think you want me," was the girl's unexpected retort.

"Because I am a fool?"

"Because you were big enough to feel sorry!"

The smile she threw back at him helped to make amends for the fact that he could not take her in his arms before the lobby-ful of guests.

Blackmail

by Hulbert Footner

Author of "On Swan River," "The Owl Taxi," "The Substitute Millionaire," etc.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LATER THAT NIGHT.

A PRIZE indeed!

Grasping the paper with hands that trembled, his eyes bright with sudden excitement, Evan read the closely-typed words:

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR TUESDAY NIGHT.

Members P. D. and H. B. will be on the ground not later than five o'clock Tuesday afternoon to make sure that no surprise is planted on us beforehand. P. D. will hang out in the little roadhouse marked *A* on the map, where he can see anything that turns the corner, and H. B. will take up his station in the saloon, *B*, at the other end of the street *C*. These two can communicate with each other by telephone if anything suspicious is observed.

Members J. T., L. A., J. M., and C. C. will proceed in two couples separately by trolley to the saloon at *B*, where they should stop for a drink for the purpose of showing themselves to H. B., who is watching there, and to give H. B. a chance to warn them if he observes anything suspicious.

All members must bear in mind that no chances must be taken. There is too much at stake. If anybody sees anything out of the way let him warn the others, and the operation be called off for the night. Unless warned by H. B., J. T. and the three others will proceed from the saloon to their station at the clump of bushes marked *D* on the road *C*. They should not get there until eight-thirty, as their continued presence in the neighborhood might arouse suspicion.

Meanwhile, T. D. and C. S. in the car, are to proceed in the car to the fork of the road, *E*, by the route they have already been over. There is no need of watching the track through the woods to *E*, as it is not marked on any map, and could not be found except by one entering from *A* or *B*, which will both be watched. The car must be in place, turned around and ready to run back at eight-thirty.

A most important duty devolves on H. B., who must satisfy himself that the man and his companion are not accompanied nor followed by the police. When the two pass the corner, *B*, let member H. B., if all is well, blow one long blast on his whistle as a signal to J. T. But if they are followed, let H. B. blow five short blasts and take to the fields.

When J. T. gets the O.K. signal let him post his men in readiness to quietly surround the two and search them for weapons. If he gets a warning signal, let him pass on a warning to T. D. and all must scatter in the market gardens and make their way home separately. After the two have been searched and sent on, J. T. will give the clear signal to T. D.

When the two arrive at the fork of the road, *E*, member C. S. will keep them covered while T. D. takes the package and examines the contents. It is supposed that the man will bring Evan Weir as his companion, and C. S. must therefore take especial care not to betray himself by his voice.

When T. D. has satisfied himself the package is O.K., let him direct the two men to continue walking by the right-hand fork of the road, and when they have passed on, let T. D. and C. S. make their getaway in the car, signaling all clear as they start. When T. D.'s clear signal is heard let all the members make their way separately to their homes. On the way back J. T. can give the word to H. B. None of the members must meet together later that night.

Meanwhile, T. D. and C. S. make their way back to town by the same route they went out by, C. S. driving T. D. after distributing the contents of the package through his various pockets, will drop off the car at any suitable spot according to his judgment, taking care that he is not under observation at the moment. He will return home, taking due precautions against being followed.

C. S. will return to his home in the car. If the car is required, a telephone message will be awaiting him there. If there is no message, let him put the car up. If he is followed, it is no great matter, nothing can be brought home to him.

After putting the car up, let him return to his home for an hour. At the end of that time, if no one has been there, he can be pretty sure that he

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for April 17.

has not been traced. At eleven o'clock then, let him proceed to the club-house and report to me on the night's happenings. He can then take the old man home. A pass-word for the night will be communicated to him verbally.

Let every member commit the contents of this paper to memory and destroy his copy.

THE CHIEF.

Evan thought hard. This communication put an entirely new complexion on affairs. Far from wishing to confront Charley, Evan now desired at any cost to avoid him. If he could only succeed in following Charley to the "clubhouse" and in trapping the elusive chief himself, what a triumph! His heart beat fast at the very thought.

He hastened down-stairs, dreading to hear Charley's key in the door. Nevertheless, he had to linger long enough to square the girl, for if Charley met her and she told him of his visitor it would spoil all.

Evan looked up and down the street. No sign of Charley yet. He rang the bell to bring the girl.

She appeared, saying scornfully: "Oh, it's you, is it?" but not ill-pleased by the summons.

"I hate waiting around," said Evan.

"He'll be here any minute now."

"I'm not so keen about seeing him anyhow. I'd rather visit with you."

"Quit your kidding, Leo."

"Come on out and have a soda while I'm waiting."

She hesitated, looked up and down—and succumbed. "All right; I'll have to hurry back. I don't need a hat."

Evan was careful to lead her toward Lexington, since it was from the other direction Charley would presumably appear.

They had their soda, never ceasing to "con" each other in the style that has been suggested. Sadie enjoyed it to the full; Evan, on the other hand, was rather hard put to it to keep up his end, for his thoughts were far away. His fits of abstraction rather added to his attractiveness in the girl's eyes; she couldn't quite make him out.

His problem was how to keep her from seeing Charley before Charley left the house for the last time, and yet be on time himself to follow Charley when he started out.

Issuing from the drug-store Evan suggested a short talk, to which Sadie was nothing loath. He steered her through another street back to Third Avenue, and managed to fetch up as if by accident before a moving-picture palace.

"Let's go in," he said carelessly. "The last show will just be beginning."

Once more Sadie hesitated, made objections—and allowed him to brush them away. Sadie was fascinated. Evan took her by the arm and marched her in in masterful style. For his own ends he chose seats in that part of the house where smoking was permitted.

To Evan's relief the picture proved to be one of which Sadie could wholly approve, and she no longer required to be entertained. She became absorbed in its unrolling. The hard eyes softened a little; clearly she was lifted out of this mundane sphere of rooming-houses and attractive, fresh young men you had to be careful with, into a realm of peculiar magnificence.

Meanwhile, Evan watched the illuminated clock with which the proprietor thoughtfully provided his patrons, and made his calculations. He had to figure closely.

He knew that all these picture houses let out at eleven, and they were only five minutes walk from the rooming-house. If the show was over a little early to-night, or if Charley was a little late in starting, all his careful planning would go for nothing.

At ten minutes to eleven the drama was still going strong with everything as yet unexplained. Evan whispered to his companion.

"I'm out of smokes. Excuse me while I get a pack at the stand."

She nodded without taking her eyes from the screen. She did not mark that he took his hat with him. He stopped not at the cigar-stand, but made his way out of the theater. There was little chance of her following while any of the fascinating drama remained unrevealed.

He stopped in a haberdasher's and bought three of the largest size handkerchiefs, for a grim purpose. Back in Thirty-Ninth Street he concealed himself in the areaway of a vacant house across the street from the rooming-house. Now, if only Sadie did not

come back before Charley went out, and if an inquisitive policeman did not put a crimp in his plans—

A church clock struck eleven, and Charley appeared almost upon the last stroke. He slammed the door after him, and his feet twittered down the steps in a style peculiarly his own. He stopped on the pavement to light a cigarette—and incidentally to look warily up and down the street.

Reassured, he started quickly toward Lexington. He was an easy man to trail, gait and appearance were both so marked. Evan could hardly lose that cheap Panama hat cocked at a slightly rakish angle.

Evan let him get around the corner before he ventured out of his hiding-place. As Evan himself reached the corner of Lexington he looked back and saw Sadie turning into the block from Third. "A close shave!" he thought.

Charley was still visible, hastening north with his loose-jointed stride, his "kangaroo lope" Evan had called it. He turned west in Forty-Second Street. This was an advantage to Evan, for Forty-Second Street is crowded at this hour. Charley took the crowded sidewalk, and Evan kept the Panama in view from across the street.

They crossed the whole central part of town, breasting the current of pedestrians bound from the theaters to the terminal station. At Sixth Avenue Charley went up one stairway to the Elevated, and Evan up the other. The platform was crowded, obviating the greatest danger of an encounter.

When a train came along Evan lost Charley for awhile, for he could not risk boarding the same car of the train. But he had little doubt where Charley was bound for; i. e., Central Bridge, the end of the line.

Up-town when the crowd began to thin out a little, Evan satisfied himself that Charley was still safe in the next car but one ahead. "Lucky for me," he thought, "they set the only hour at night when the cars are crowded."

At the end of the line there were still many left to get off, among whom Evan safely lost himself. Most of these people (including the Panama hat) climbed to the viaduct above, where they waited for the red trolley cars of various lines.

Charley boarded a Lafayette Avenue car, but displayed an inclination to remain out on the back platform. This was a poser for Evan, but he managed, with several others, to crowd on the front end, which is against the rules.

He found a little seat in the corner of the motorman's compartment where he sat down in the dark. Looking back through the car he could make out a square of Charley's striped coat through one of the rear windows. He kept his eye on that.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CORINNA ONCE MORE.

CHARLEY rode clear to the end of the line at Featherbed Lane. Evan, by lingering to ask the motorman a question as to his supposed direction, let him get away from the car.

Eight people got off at this point. Five waited at the transverse tracks for the Yonkers car, while three, of whom Evan and Charley were two, crossed the tracks and kept on heading north by the automobile highway.

They were at the extreme edge of the town in this direction. The last electric lights were behind them; only a house or two remained alongside the road, then tall woods and darkness.

There was no sidewalk; they proceeded up the middle of the road, first Charley, then the suburbanite, then Evan. Charley frequently looked over his shoulder, the pale patch of his face revealed in the receding light. But Evan kept on boldly, confident that he could not be recognized with the lights at his back.

The suburbanite turned in at one of the houses; Charley was presently swallowed by the shadow of the woods. Evan made believe to turn in at the last house, but dropped in the ditch, and crept along until he, too, gained the woods.

Running in the soft stuff at the side, pausing to listen, and running ahead again, Evan continued to follow Charley by the sound of his nervous steps on the hard road. The road turned slightly, and the lights behind them passed out of sight. The tall

trees pressed close on either hand, and it was as dark below as in a cavern.

The steps ceased. Evan paused, listening. Had Charley stopped, or had he, too, taken to the soft stuff? They recommenced, grew louder—he was coming back!

Evan hastily withdrew close under the bushes at the side. Charley passed him at five yards distance. In the stillness Evan could even hear his agitated breathing.

In a queer way Evan felt for him. It was no joke to fancy oneself followed on such a road at such an hour. He showed pluck in thus boldly venturing back.

Evan was obliged to take into account the possibility that this whole excursion up the dark road might be a feint. He dared not let Charley out of sight and hearing. He followed him back to the turn in the road, still creeping in the soft stuff. From this point Charley's figure was outlined against the twinkling lights of the trolley terminus, and Evan waited to see what he would do.

Charley went back to the edge of the woods, stopped, listened, walked back and forth a few times, then returned toward Evan, but now, like the other man, taking care to muffle his steps in the grass alongside. Evan could only see him at moments now. He was on Evan's side of the road. Evan drew back under a thick bush.

Charley came creeping along, bent almost double with the primordial instinct of concealment. He paused to listen so close to Evan that the latter, squatting under his bush, could have reached out and touched Charley's foot.

Evan breathed from the top of his lungs, wondering that the beating of his heart did not betray him. He heard Charley's breath come in uneven little jerks.

For seconds Charley stood there. Was it possible he knew an enemy was near? Evan could make out his head turning this way and that. The tension was hard on nerves. Though he lay as still as a snake it seemed incredible to Evan that Charley did not feel his nearness.

Finally he went on, and a soft, blessed breath of relief escaped Evan.

He gave him ten yards and started to follow. Charley was on the alert now; very well, he must be twice as alert and beat him at his own game. Evan followed him by the swish of his feet in the grass, by the soft brushing of leaves against his clothes, by the crackle of an occasional twig under foot, at the same time taking care to betray no similar sounds himself. The advantage was greatly with the one who followed, for he knew the other man was there, while the one in front only feared.

Evan's patient stalking was interrupted by the passage of an automobile. He was obliged to seek cover from the rays of its headlights. It bowled up the road with a gay party laughing and talking, all unsuspecting of the drama being enacted beside the road.

Before it was well by Evan was out again. For a second he had a glimpse of Charley running like a deer up the road. Then he plunged into the bushes. Whatever the automobile party thought of this apparition, they did not stop to investigate.

Evan hastened to the vicinity of the spot where he had seen Charley disappear. Lying low, he concentrated all the power of his will on the act of hearing. He was rewarded by the whisper of a sound from within the woods to the left of the road.

It was repeated. Some one was creeping away in that direction. Charley had left the road. A sharp anxiety attacked Evan, for his difficulties were now redoubled.

But when he sought to feel a way into the woods, he discovered a place near by where it was comparatively open. There was no underbrush. In fact, a road was suggested; a former road, perhaps, for it was rough and tangled underfoot.

Evan's heart bounded. Could this be the track that led direct to the abandoned house? He lost all sound of Charley, but continued to press forward full of hope.

At intervals he paused to listen, but no sound such as he wished to hear reached his ears; only the whisper of the night breeze among the leaves, and the faint, far-off hum of the living world. A hundred feet or so from the highway the wood track made a turn, and the trees hemmed him all about. The darkness of the road outside was as twilight to the blackness that surrounded him here.

Suddenly a sixth sense warned Evan of danger from behind. He whirled around only to receive the impact of a leaping figure which bore him to the earth.

Dazed by the fall, for a moment he was at a hopeless disadvantage. The whole weight of the other man was on his chest. Evan struck up at him ineffectually.

Charley's voice whispered hoarsely: "I'm armed. Give up, or I'll shoot you like a dog! Will you give up?"

"Never!" muttered Evan.

The effect was surprising. "Evan! You! Oh, my God!" whispered Charley. The tense body slackened for a moment. Evan, gathering his strength, heaved up and threw him off.

But Charley was quick, too. When Evan reached for him he was not there. Grinding his teeth with rage, Evan scrambled for him on hands and knees. The other kept just beyond his reach.

Both were confused by the utter darkness. Each time one succeeded in getting to his feet, he promptly crashed over a branch again. Evan clutched at Charley's clothes, and Charley wrenched himself free. Charley seeking to escape Evan collided with him and recoiled gasping.

Meanwhile he never ceased imploring him in a desperate whisper. But it was something more than the note of personal fear that actuated his pleading.

"Evan, hold up! You don't know what you're doing! Evan, listen! Let me talk to you quietly! I swear I'm on the square! Evan, for God's sake hold up, or I swear I'll have to shoot you!"

But Evan was past listening. "Throw your gun away, and stand up to me like a man!" he said thickly.

In the mad, blind scramble, Charley finally got his bearings and started to run back toward the highway. Evan plunged after him. Charley tripped and fell headlong, and Evan came down on top of him.

Charley was helpless then, for in strength he was no match for Evan. Yet he still struggled desperately. Not to escape, though. His hand was in his pocket. Not for his gun; that was already out.

He managed to get the hand to his lips, and then Evan understood. The warning whistle! As Charley drew breath to blow, Evan snatched it out of his hand and flung it into the bush.

While Charley still implored him, Evan shook out a handkerchief in his teeth, and gagged him. With the other handkerchiefs that he had brought against such a contingency, he tied his hands behind his back, and tied his ankles. He then possessed himself of Charley's pocket searchlight, and with it found the revolver, which had flown from Charley's hand when he fell.

With his antagonist bound and helpless at his feet, Evan cooled down. He rapidly considered what he must do next. He had no means of knowing how well the old house might be barricaded, and it would be the height of foolhardiness to attempt to storm it single-handed.

On the other hand, if he took the time to go for the police, the chief of the gang, warned of danger by Charley's non-arrival, might make his getaway. Perhaps he could commandeer an automobile. Late as it was, an occasional car still passed on the highway. Evan hastened back.

As he turned the bend in the road he saw the lights of a car standing in the main road with engine softy running. Evan prudently slowed down. The occupants could not possibly see him yet. They were talking. Evan listened.

One said: "Well, it's all over now, anyway."

Another replied: "Come on in, and let's see what was the matter?"

"Into that black hole? Not on your life!"

"We have flash-lights."

"Yes, and a nice mark they'd make for bullets!"

This was sufficiently reassuring. Evan showed himself. He saw an expensive runabout with two young fellows in it. They burst out simultaneously:

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, I had a fight with a crook in there," said Evan. "They have a hang-out in an old abandoned house."

"Do you want any help?"

"No, thanks. I've got him tied up. But I wish you'd go for the police, if you don't mind."

"Sure thing! The nearest station's Tremont, five miles over bad roads. We'll bring 'em back in half an hour!"

In his excitement the young fellow threw his clutch in, and the big car leaped down the road before Evan could give him any further particulars.

On his way back Evan felt certain compunctions at the sight of Charley lying bound in the road. After all, Charley had been his friend for many a year. He wouldn't mind saving him from the consequences of his own folly if he could.

That the police might not discover him when they came, Evan dragged him out of the road, and under a thick, leafy bush to one side. Charley made imploring sounds through the gag.

Evan continued along the rough track. He had the pocket flash to help him over the rough places now. In a quarter of a mile or more from the highway he came upon the dark mass of the old house rising against the night sky. It stood on a little rise in the midst of its clearing, which could scarcely be called a clearing now, for except in a small space immediately around the building, the young trees were rising thickly.

It was a square block of a design somewhat freakish for a country residence, since the principal story was above the entrance floor. There was a row of tall windows here, and above these windows an attic in the style of the eighteenth century.

The tall windows evidently lighted the great room where Evan had suffered his ordeal at the hands of the Ikunahkatsi. It was in one of the back rooms on the same floor that the chief had his sanctum, he told himself. All the windows of the house were dark, but this did not prove that people were not within and awake, for Evan remembered the heavy shutters inside the windows.

He waited for a minute or two, and then began to get restless. In fact, he itched for the glory of taking the chief single-handed. The letter of instructions had suggested that the chief would be alone in the building to-night, except for the old negress and the prisoner.

And Evan was armed now. If he could find some way to make an entrance without giving an alarm, he believed it could be done.

He stole up to the front door on all fours. It was locked, of course. He went around to the back; there were two doors here, both locked. He went from window to window. All of them had panes missing, but within each window the heavy shutters were closed and barred.

He thought of cellar windows, sometimes they were forgotten. In certain places thick clumps of sumach had sprang up close to the house. Pushing behind one such clump he stumbled on an old stone stair leading down. Once it had been closed by inclined doors, but these had rotted and fallen in. The steps led him into the cellar.

With the aid of his light he picked his way over the piles of rubbish and around the brick piers. Immense brick arches supported the chimneys of the house. They built more generously in those days. The rats scuttled out of his way.

In the center of the space there was a steep stair leading up. It looked sound. Pocketing his light he crept up step by step and with infinite care tried the door at the top. It yielded! He was in!

All was dark and silent throughout the house. He judged that he must be in the central hall. He dared not use his light now, but felt his way toward the front.

The sensation was not unlike that when he had been led through the house blindfolded. He touched the edge of the stairway, and guided himself to the foot. As he turned to mount, a sound brought the heart into his throat.

He identified it, and smiled grimly. It was a human snore and it came through the door on his left. This was the room where he had been confined, and it was more than likely old Simeon Deaves was sleeping there now.

He went up, stepping on the sides of the stair-treads to avoid making them creak. The stairway turned on itself in the middle, and at the top he was facing the front of the house again. Here he had to flash his light for a second.

Immediately before him a pair of doors gave on the big room. They stood open.

There were two more doors, one on each hand, both closed. Evan put out his light. As he did so a tiny ray of light became visible through the keyhole of the door on his left.

Evan dropped the light in his pocket and took out his gun. Drawing a deep breath to steady himself, he smartly turned the handle, and flinging the door open, stepped back into the darkness.

He saw in the center of the great, bare, ruinous room an old packing-case with a common lamp upon it, and a smaller box to sit on. He saw in the corner an army cot with a little figure lying upon it covered by a carriage robe; a figure which turned over and sat up at the sound of the door. He saw—

Corinna!

CHAPTER XXXV.

CONTEST.

THE shock of astonishment unmanned Evan. His pistol arm dropped weakly at his side, his mouth hung open, he stared like an idiot.

To have crept into the house heart in mouth and pistol in hand, to have nerved himself to meet and overcome a desperate criminal—and then to find this! The violence of the reaction threw all his machinery out of gear; he stalled. He felt inclined to laugh weakly.

Corinna could not see him clearly, though presumably she was aware of a figure standing in the hall. She was very much affronted by the violence of the intrusion, and not in the least afraid. She sat up with her glorious hair a little tousled, and her eyes flashing like a diminutive empress's.

"Mr. Straiker, is it you? What do you mean by this intrusion?" she demanded sharply.

Evan could not readily find his tongue. Amazement broke over him in succeeding waves like a surf. Corinna! Corinna here! Corinna a member of the blackmailing gang! Corinna, the chief! Oh, impossible! He was in a nightmare!

"Mr. Straiker!" repeated Corinna more sharply. "Come in at once!" She was on her feet now.

Evan's faculties began to work again. In anticipation he tasted the sweets of perfect revenge. This little creature had put an intolerable humiliation upon him. Very well, here she was, absolutely in his power. Dropping the gun in his pocket, he stepped into the room smiling.

At sight of him Corinna did not cry out, but the shock she received was dreadfully evident in her eyes. She went back a step, one hand went to her breast, her lips formed the syllable "You!"—but no sound came from them. Every vestige of color faded from her face.

Evan's gaze burned her up; she was so beautiful, and she had injured him so! "So you're a member of the gang!" he said mockingly.

Corinna quickly recovered her forces. She shrugged disdainfully.

"And even the chief, it seems!"

"So it seems."

Amazement overcame him afresh. "You—you little thing!" he cried. "I simply cannot believe it!"

Corinna affected to look bored.

"So this was the real work of the brotherhood!" Evan went on. "Blackmail. This was why you couldn't fire them when they threatened you. A new way to raise money for philanthropic purposes, I swear! To hold up a usurer with one hand, and feed poor children with the other!"

"A usurer, yes," said Corinna contemptuously. "Your master!"

"That doesn't get under my skin," retorted Evan coolly. "No man is my master a day longer than I choose." He dissolved in amazement again. "But you! To think up such a scheme! To carry it out!"

"Oh, spare me your bleating!" said Corinna impatiently. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Turn you over to the police," he said promptly.

"Three of my friends are sleeping across the hall," she said.

So perfect was her aplomb that Evan was taken aback. He half turned, uncertainly. But as he did so, out of the tail of his eye he saw Corinna's hand go to her bosom.

He whirled back with the gun in his hand again. A woman is at a serious disadvantage in drawing.

"Put your gun on the box," commanded Evan.

"I have no gun!" she cried. "I will not be spoken to so."

Evan took a step nearer her. His eyes glittered.

"Put your gun on the box. Don't oblige me to use force. I should enjoy it far too well!"

With a sob of rage, she drew a little pistol from her dress and threw it on the box. Evan possessed himself of it.

"Now we'll see about the three friends across the hall," he said mockingly.

He backed out of the room. Corinna followed to the door. In her eye he read her purpose to make a dash for liberty down the stairs, and he took care to give her no opening.

He flung open the door opposite and flashed his light inside the room. It was empty, of course. He returned across the hall, and Corinna backed into the lighted room before him.

"They have stepped out, it seems," he said mockingly.

Corinna disdained to reply. Like a child, she was not in the least abashed when her bluff was called, but immediately set her wits to work to think of another.

"How do you purpose taking me to the police?" she asked scornfully.

"I'm not going to take you. They're coming here."

Corinna changed color. She studied his face narrowly. Evidently she decided that he was bluffing now, for she tossed her head.

"Go and sit down on the cot," he said coolly, "so we can talk quietly."

"I will not!" cried Corinna. "How dare you command me!"

He was enchanted with the spirit she showed in the face of hopeless odds. "It's too bad no one did it long ago," he said provokingly.

He approached her, and his eyes glittered again. Corinna, seething with rage, retreated, and plumped herself down on the cot.

"That's better," he said indulgently. He took the small box and placing it against the wall, sat down and leaned back. Producing his pipe he filled it in leisurely style, affecting to be unconscious of her. Corinna's eye blazed on him.

"Well, what have you to say for yourself?" he drawled at last. "You pretty little blackmailer!"

"You needn't insult me!" cried Corinna. Her eyes filled with angry tears.

But Evan's heart was hard. "Insult you!" he cried. "I like that! What have you been doing to me lately?"

"If you were capable of thinking, you would see that I could not have acted otherwise!" she said.

"You have me there," said Evan coolly. "For I don't see the necessity of being a blackmailer."

Corinna jumped up and stamped her foot. Her face reddened, and two large tears rolled down her cheeks. "Don't you dare to use that word to me again, you fool!"

Evan laughed delightedly. "Why shy at the word and swallow the deed?"

"You know nothing of the circumstances!" she stormed. "You have neither sense nor feeling! You take all your ideas ready made from others. You are as empty as a bass drum!"

"Bravo!" he cried. "Keep it up if it makes you feel any better!"

"If it is a crime to extort money from a foul old robber and give it to the poor, all right, I'm a criminal! I glory in it! I would do it all over again!"

"I don't deny one has a sneaking sympathy with a life of crime," Evan said, affecting a judicial air. "But after all, law is law. You have to make your choice. I chose to stay inside the law, and naturally I have to uphold it, like everybody on my side."

"You're a nice upholder of the law!" she cried. "You're just trying to get back at me!"

Evan grinned. "You're so frank, Corinna! But, after all, being on the side of the law gives me an advantage now, doesn't it?"

"Yes, if you want to take the pay of a scoundrel like Deaves."

"Oh, I was fired some days ago. I'm working on my own now."

"You're just angry and jealous!"

"I dare say. I admit I don't mind your blackmailing operations half as much as the other thing."

"What other thing?"

"Those fellows on the Ernestina: to take advantage of their hunger and thirst for you, and use them for your own ends."

"Everything was understood between us. Everything was open and aboveboard."

"Of course. But they were already enslaved, you see. And you forced them to serve your pride and arrogance. You queened it over them. That makes me more indignant than blackmailing a usurer, for that's a crime against a man's best feelings, and I'm a man myself."

"You're only jealous!"

"Why should I be? I wouldn't stand for the brotherhood. I know you gave me —or I took, more than you ever gave them."

"You're a brute!"

"Why—sure!"

There was a silence. Corinna kept her eyes down. It was impossible to say of what she was thinking. But her passion of anger visibly subsided. She murmured at last:

"If as you say, you sympathize with me for getting money out of Simeon Deaves—"

"I didn't quite say that," interrupted Evan. "But it's near enough. Go on!"

"Why do you want to hand me over to the police?"

It was fun to torment Corinna, and it satisfied his deep need for vengeance. But the sight of her quiet, with the curved lashes lying on her cheeks, and the soft lips drooping, went to his breast like a knife. Vengeance was suddenly appeased. Such a gallant little crook!

He realized that not for a moment had he really intended to hand her over. He jumped up.

"I'm not going to send you to jail," he said. "You're going to make restitution."

Corinna stared.

"What do you mean?"

"Give me an order on Dordess for the bonds—if it is Dordess who has them, and give me your word that you will lead an honest life hereafter." He was smiling.

Corinna blazed up afresh. "Never!" she cried. "I'd die rather!"

"You *must* do it!"

"Why must I?"

"Because you're going to marry me, and naturally I want an honest woman to wife."

Corinna laughed a peal. "I'd die rather! And you know it now!"

Indeed in his heart he was not at all sure but that her Satanic pride might break her before she would give in, but he bluffed it out.

"Come on!" he said. "There's no time to lose. I have sent for the police, though you make out not to believe it. I see you've been writing on the table. Sit down and write me an order for the bonds."

"Break up our organization on your say-so? Never!"

"If you don't the police will. Come now, whatever happens, you can't go on using those infatuated boys to further your own ends. That's low, Corinna; that's like offering a starving man husks."

"You have your gun in your pocket," she cried passionately. "Use it, for you'll never break my will!"

"It's not a bullet that waits you, but jail," said Evan grimly. "No grand stand finish, but endless dragging days in a four-by-ten cell! Come on, give up the loot. You'll have to, anyhow, and go to jail in the bargain!"

"It's not loot!" she cried. "It's mine! By every rule of justice and right, it's mine! Simeon Deaves robbed my father—beggared him and brought him to his grave!"

"Ha!" cried Evan. "I might have guessed there was something personal here! But some one has to lose in the warfare of business."

"This was not the chance of warfare. This was malice, cold and calculated. I'll tell you. It spoiled my childhood. Deaves and my father were workers in the same church. You didn't know, did you, that Deaves was a religious man. Oh, yes, always a pillar of some church until his avarice grew so upon him that he could no longer bring himself to subscribe.

"My father learned that he was using

his position in our church to lend money to other members at usurious interest, and to collect it under threats of exposure. My father showed him up, and he was put out of the church. He set about a cold and patient scheme of revenge, but we didn't learn this until the crash came a couple of years afterward.

"He bought up—what do you call it?—all my father's paper, the notes every merchant has to give to carry on his business. At last he presented all my father's outstanding indebtedness at once with a demand for instant payment, and when my father couldn't meet it, Deaves sold him out, and we were ruined. It killed my father and embittered my mother's few remaining years."

"That was what I grew up with. I don't know when it started, but the determination to punish him grew and grew in my mind until it crowded out every other thought. I planned for years before I made a move to do anything.

"I followed him. I learned all about him. His avarice went to such lengths at last that I began to see my chance to show him up.

"I met Dordess and the others and the idea of the Avengers slowly took shape. There was something fine to us in the idea of making him pay to bring pleasure and health to the poor.

"None of us would spend a cent of his filthy money on ourselves. What have I done to Deaves to repay the crushing blows he dealt to me and mine?—a few pin-pricks, that's all. Well, it is my life. I cannot change it now."

Evan was more softened than he cared to show. "I understand," he said. "It excuses your heart, but not your head. It was so foolish to try to buck the law!"

"I can't help it," she said. "I would rather die than return what I have made that old robber disgorge. I have worked too long for this!"

Evan inwardly groaned. To reason with her seemed so hopeless.

"You can't live outside the pale of the law," he said. "No man can, let alone a tender woman. Only wretchedness can come of it!"

"I'll take my chance," she said with curling lip. "Thank God, I have friends who are not so timid."

Evan changed his tone. "Well, never mind the right and the wrong of it," he said earnestly. "Do it because I love you. I love you with all my heart. We quarrel, but my heart speaks to yours. You must hear it.

"I have endured from you what I believe no man ever forgave a woman. But I forgive you. If you go to jail my life will be a desert. But go to jail you shall, unless you make restitution!"

Corinna laughed mirthlessly. "Funny kind of love!" she said.

"It is the best kind of love. I have sense enough left to realize that if I give in to you on a clear question of right it would ruin us both. We would despise each other."

"I have promised to trouble the Deaveses no further," she said. "They're satisfied."

"The bonds must go back."

"I had already decided to break up the Avengers, too. Isn't that enough?"

He shook his head.

She turned away. "You ask the impossible," she said. "I'd rather die!"

"But to go to jail," he said relentlessly, "to have your beautiful hair cut off"—(he was not at all sure of this, but he supposed she was not either)—"to wear the hideous prison dress, to have the sickly prison pallor in your clear cheeks, and your eyes dimmed. Your best years, Corinna!"

This went home. She paled; her breath came unevenly. "You say you love me," she murmured, "and you'd hand me over to that."

"I must!"

Corinna said very low: "I love you. Isn't that enough? Costs me something to say it. Costs me my pride. It would have been more merciful to beat me with a club. I cannot entreat you. I never learned how. But—but I *am* entreating you. Love me, Evan. Let us begin from now. Let the past be past."

Evan was tempted then. His senses reeled. But something held fast. "I can't!" he said.

She shrank sharply. "It is useless then."

she muttered. "I will not be a repentant sinner!"

"For the sake of our love, Corinna!"

"You do not love me. You want to master me."

He groaned in his helplessness.

Suddenly an ominous, peremptory knock on the front door rang through the empty house.

"The police!" gasped Evan.

"Then it's over!" said Corinna, desperately calm.

"No!" he cried. "Quick! Write! I'll get you out!"

She dragged him toward the door. "Ah, come! Come!" she beseeched him.

The very heart was dragged out of his breast, but he resisted her. "Choose!" he whispered. "A living death or happiness!"

For an instant their desperate eyes contended. Corinna read in his that he would never give in. She ran to the box and scribbled three lines. The knock was repeated below.

She handed him the sheet with averted head. Evan blew out the lamp. Hand in hand they ran softly down-stairs. The knock was repeated for the third time and a gruff voice commanded:

"Open the door at once, or we'll break it down!"

Aunt Liza was in the lower hall whimpering: "Lawsy! What you gwine do, miss?" And behind her they heard Simeon Deaves muttering confusedly: "What's the matter? What's the matter?"

Evan breathed in Corinna's ear: "The cellar door under the stairs. You lead the woman."

He felt for Simeon Deaves, and got his hand. "Follow me," he whispered. "I'll save you."

Deaves came unresistingly, his old wits in a daze.

As Evan got the cellar door open the blows were falling on the front door. He flashed his light to show his little party the way down. He came last and closed the door. As he did so the front door went in with a crash. Joining the others Evan whispered:

"Take it easy. They'll likely search the rooms first."

The old man whispered tremulously: "What's the matter? I don't understand."

"Be very quiet," returned Evan. "We're taking you home now. Be quiet and there will be no publicity."

It was a magical suggestion. They heard no more from Deaves.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

TOWARD MORNING.

MEANWHILE heavy feet were tramping overhead. Doors were flung open. One man ran up-stairs.

There were at least three men. Evan did not think it possible they had come in sufficient force to completely surround the house. It was safe enough to flash his light in the depths of the cellar.

He led the way to the foot of the stone steps. The stars showed through the broken door overhead.

Making them wait behind him, he cautiously parted the thick screen of bushes and looked out. Nothing was stirring on this side the house. The grass and weeds were waist high down to the edge of the woods.

It was less than fifty yards to shelter. Evan whispered to his little party:

"Hands and knees through the grass. Take it slow. Each one keep a hand on the ankle of the one in front. Corinna, you go first."

It was done as he ordered. Surely a more oddly-assorted party of fugitives never acted in concert to escape the law—girl, negress, multimillionaire and artist.

Like a snake with four articulations, they wound through the grass. In the most sophisticated man lingers a wild strain; the stiff-jointed millionaire took to this primitive means of locomotion as naturally as the negress.

As they left the house behind them, they came more within the range of vision of those who were presumably watching the front and back. At any rate while they were still fifty feet from the trees, a hoarse voice was raised from the front: "There they go!" And an answering shout came from the rear.

The four fugitives of one accord rose to

their feet and dashed for the trees. Gaining the shadows Corinna whispered:

"We must separate. You take Deaves."

Evan pressed her own revolver back in her hand whispering: "Fire it off if you are in danger."

Seizing Deaves's hand, Evan pulled him away to the right. Corinna and Aunt Liza melted in the other direction. The old man came through the underbrush like a reaping machine, and of course the police took after them.

For a moment Evan considered abandoning him. He would come to some harm of course, but on the other hand Evan now ardently desired to have the whole affair hushed up. He got him across the rough road in safety, and on the other side, coming to an immense spruce-tree with drooping branches, he dragged him under it, and they sank down on a fragrant bed of needles.

The pursuing policemen coming to the road, instinctively turned off upon it, and Evan knew they were safe then. Presently they came back, aimlessly threshing the woods and flashing their lights, but they had lost the trail now. They were looking for a needle in a hay-stack.

Evan's only fear was that they might stumble on Charley, but he heard no sounds from that direction that indicated they had done so. The sounds of searching moved off to the other side of the road, and Evan determined to go to Charley himself.

Leaving the old man with an admonition to silence—Evan by the way was careful to disguise his voice in addressing him—he set off. He found Charley where he had left him under the leafy bush. Evan whispered in his ear:

"I am on your side now. The police are all around us. Make no sound!"

He unbound Charley. The latter sat up and rubbed his ankles. Whatever he thought of the new turn of affairs, he said nothing.

Evan said: "I have Deaves back here. Follow me."

Foot by foot they crept back in a course parallel to the rough road. Hearing footsteps approach they hugged the earth. Two men passed in the road. One was saying:

"Send Wilson back in the car to the road-house to telephone for enough men to surround this patch of woods. You patrol the road outside."

Evan and Charley crept away through the underbrush like foxes at the sight of the hunter.

They reached the big spruce-tree without further accident. The old man greeted them with a moan of relief. Evan and Charley drew away from him a little, while they consulted.

Evan said: "Corinna and Aunt Liza are somewhere in the woods across the road. We had to separate. How can we get in touch with them?"

"They'll be all right," muttered Charley. "Corinna knows this place. They're safer than we are."

"I can't leave here until I am more sure," said Evan. "Will you take the old man and put him on the way home?"

"All right."

"How will you go? I'll have to follow you later."

"The Lafayette trolley line will be watched, and the Yonkers line stops at one. We'll have to walk to Yonkers. Follow the track through the woods in the other direction, and it will put you on a regular road. Keep going in a westerly direction."

"I get you," said Evan. "Where does Corinna live?"

"What do you want to know for?" growled Charley.

"If I hear nothing from her here I want to go to make sure she got home all right."

"Well, I won't tell you."

"Everything is changed now. I am on your side and hers."

"I hear you say it," Charley said sullenly.

Evan's sense of justice forced him to admit that Charley was justified. "Well, will you do this?" he said. "When you've got the old man off your hands, go to her place yourself, and then come to me and tell me if she's all right."

"I'll do it if she wants me to," Charley said.

"Here's your flash-light," said Evan. "I'll keep the gun a little while, in case Corinna calls for my help."

Charley pocketed the light in silence and led the old man forth from under the tree. Simeon Deaves that night was like a pet dog on a leader, passed impatiently from hand to hand.

Evan, fancying that the thick branches hindered him from hearing, crept out and lay in the grass. The woods were not so thick in this place. This had evidently been part of the grounds surrounding the old house in its palmy days, and the spruce was a relic of those times.

He heard an automobile approach in the highway, and stop at the end of the woods track. This would be the man returning from having telephoned. All sounds of the search through the woods had ceased. Evidently they had decided that the better way was to watch all outlets.

No sound from any quarter betrayed the whereabouts of Corinna and the old negress. They were swallowed up as completely as if they had taken to their burrows like rabbits. Evan's heart was with her, wherever she was.

He had not the same anxious solicitude for her, that one would have for an ordinary woman hunted in the dark woods, for he was well assured that Corinna was not a prey to the imaginary terrors that affect most women. She would be no less at home in the woods at night than he was himself.

Still no sound came from her. He was not at all sure that she would summon him if hard pressed, but they could not take her without his hearing it.

In the end the graying sky in the east bade him consider his own retreat if he wished to avoid capture. He had committed no crime of course, but he was very sensible of the awkwardness of trying to explain his own share in the night's doings should he be taken. He had good hopes that Corinna had escaped by now. He started to make his way westward.

He made a wide detour around the house and struck into the rough track on the other side, traveling softly, and keeping his ears open. He had heard no searchers on this side.

After a half mile or so he saw light through the trees ahead. He saw that a road bound the woods on this side, and open fields beyond.

He struck into the woods again, and took a cautious reconnaisance of the road from the underbrush before venturing upon it—the lower world was filled with ghostly light now. It was well that he did so, for he saw a burly individual loafing in the highway, with his eye on the end of the woods track. He wore civilian clothes, but "policeman" was written all over him.

Evan had to get across that road somehow, but it was so straight the watcher could see half a mile in either direction. And on the other side there was no cover, only cultivated fields.

There was one spot some hundreds of yards north where the road dipped into a hollow and was lost to view for a short space. Evan keeping well within the woods made for that.

There was a stream with a bridge over it. By hugging the edge of the stream and ducking under the bridge he made the other side of the road. A field of growing corn received him.

That was his last serious hazard. In the sweet coolness of the dawn he made his way over field after field, keeping the sunrise at his back. He crossed the roads circumspectly and gave the villages a wide berth.

Finally he climbed a wooded hill, and from the other side looked down into the city of Yonkers. Here he ventured to show himself openly, took a car for town, and an hour and a half later was climbing the stairs to his own room. His heart was still heavy with anxiety.

When he entered he saw Charley sitting at his table with his head on his arms, asleep. Evan's heart leaped. He shook the sleeper.

"Is she all right?" he cried.

Charley lifted a sullen and resentful face. "She got home all right," he muttered, and immediately started for the door, still swaying with sleep.

"Wait a minute," said Evan. "Here's your gun."

Charley held out his hand for it without looking at the other.

Evan no longer blamed Charley for what

had seemed like treachery. Indeed his heart was warm now toward his old friend. "Don't you want to stop and talk things over?" he asked.

"I have nothing to say to you." Charley said sorely, and went on out.

Evan with a sigh, turned bedward.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DEAVES TURNS PHILANTHROPIST.

DURING his long vigil beside the spruce-tree a scheme for dealing out poetic justice all around had occurred to Evan. Of course one can never tell in advance how people are going to take things, but he had chuckled and resolved to try it anyhow. So full was he of his scheme, even in sleep, that he awoke in an hour, and bathed, dressed and breakfasted at his usual time.

On the slip of paper that Corinna had given Evan was written:

THOMAS DORDESS,
East End Building.
Give Weir the bonds. C. PLAYFAIR.

Evan presented himself at this address at a few minutes past nine when offices were just opening. Dordess it appeared was not a journalist, as Evan had once guessed, but an architect; that is to say, an elderly architectural draftsman, one of the race of slaves who help build other men's reputations.

Early as it was Dordess had already been apprised of Evan's coming. Evan had only to look at him to know that. The ironic smile of the man of the world was on his lips, the resentful hatred of a youth for his successful rival in his eyes.

The package of bonds was already done up and waiting, it appeared. With scarcely a glance at Corinna's note, which Evan offered him, Dordess handed it over.

"Better open it and look them over," he said bitterly.

"Time enough for that," said Evan. "I want to talk to you."

Dordess's eyebrows went up.

"Oh, I know you hate me like the devil," said Evan. "But I'm hoping you'll know me better some day. Anyhow I want to talk to you privately for a few minutes. Is it safe here? I want to put up a scheme to you."

Dordess indicated the package. "What more is there to say?" he asked with his bitter smile.

"Better hear it," said Evan. "It may make it easier all around. Won't hurt you to listen, anyway."

"All right," said Dordess. "Can't talk here. Too many going in and out. I'll come out with you."

They concealed themselves in an alcove of the café across the street.

"What's your scheme?" said Dordess. "Shoot!"

"Well, I gather from your general humorous style," said Evan, "that it was you who wrote the letters for the Ikunahkatsi. By the way, what does Ikunahkatsi mean?"

"An Indian word for the avengers. Yes. I wrote the letters. What of it?"

"I want you to write one more. Also another article for the Clarion."

"I would have to consult Miss Playfair."

"No. She mustn't know anything about it until later."

"Nothing doing, then."

"But listen!"

Their heads drew close over the table, and for five minutes Evan talked uninterruptedly. As Dordess listened his expression changed oddly; a conflict of feelings was visible in his face; incredulity, chagrin, an unwilling admiration and laughter.

"Damn you!" he cried at last. "It's true I hate you! I wish to God you were an out-and-out bad one so I could hate you right. But you're trying to bluff me that you're a decent head! I don't believe you!"

Evan laughed. "Call my bluff," he said. "I'd do the writing myself, only it would lose all its effect in another hand, and anyway I never could imitate your style."

"Very well, I'll do it," said Dordess. "Come back to my office in an hour and a half and they'll be ready."

He was as good as his word. He and Evan laughed grimly together over the result of his labors.

"Send it up by messenger," said Evan. "It will save time. I'll be on hand when it arrives."

It was past eleven when Evan rang the bell of the Deaves house. He was not without anxiety as to the reception he would receive. It was possible that the old man when he had quieted down might begin to remember things, and to put two and two together. But he had to take that chance.

He learned that Simeon Deaves was not yet up, that Mrs. George Deaves was out, and her husband in the library. The latter received him with no friendly face.

"You shouldn't have come here," he said.

Evan excused himself on the score of his anxiety about the old man.

"Papa got home all right," said George. "What happened to you last night?"

Evan led him to suppose that his chase had ended in nothing.

"Oh," said the other, "papa told a confused story about the house where he was confined being raided by the police, and a chase through the woods. I thought maybe you were mixed up in it."

The old man had not recognized him then. Evan was relieved. He affected to be greatly astonished.

"The police!" he said. "Who could have put them on to it? There was nothing in the paper this morning."

"No, thank Heaven!" said Deaves fervently. "Maybe his mind was wandering. I couldn't make sense of his story. I hope and pray the thing is done with now.

But poor George Deaves was due to receive a shock when the second man presently entered.

"Letter by messenger, sir. No answer."

At the sight of the superscription Deaves turned livid and fell back in his chair. He stared at the envelope like a man bewitched. He moistened his lips and essayed to speak, but no sound came out.

"What's the matter?" asked Evan when the servant had left.

"Another letter — already!" whispered Deaves huskily. "And only yesterday—four hundred thousand! What a fool I was to believe in their promises!"

"But open it!" said Evan.

"I can't—I can't face any more!"

"Let me."

Deaves feebly shoved it toward him.

Evan tore open the envelope. His cue was to express surprise, and he did not neglect it.

"Listen!" he cried. "This is extraordinary! This is not what you expect!" He read:

"DEAR MR. DEAVES:

"The securities came safely to hand. Many thanks for your promptness and courtesy in the matter. To be sure, your employee did not obey instructions, but as it happened, no harm came of it. We trust your father got home all right. We so much enjoyed having him with us.

"Well, Mr. Deaves, this terminates our very pleasant business relations—that is to say, it will terminate them, unless you are disposed to fall in with the new proposition we are about to put up to you."

George Deaves groaned hollowly at this point.

"Wait!" said Evan. "It is not what you think!" He resumed:

"As a testimonial of our gratitude for your favors, we purpose, with your approval, to apply your father's great contribution to a worthy charitable cause in his name. Let Mr. Deaves write a letter to Mr. Cornelius Verplanck, president of the Amsterdam Trust Company, according to the form marked enclosure No. 1. This to be mailed him at once. If this is done in time, the enclosure marked No. 2 will appear in all the New York evening papers.

"Very sincerely,
"THE IKUNAHKATSI.

"P. S.—It is scarcely necessary to state that Mr. Verplanck does not know the writer or any of his associates. We have chosen him simply because of his wide reputation for philanthropy."

"I don't understand," murmured Deaves in a daze. "What are the enclosures?"

Evan read:

"Enclosure No. 1. Form of letter to be sent to Mr. Verplanck.

"DEAR MR. VERPLANCK:

"In the course of the day you will receive from me the sum of four hundred thousand dollars in United States Government bonds. My wish is that you establish with this sum a fund to be known as the Simeon Deaves Trust, the income of which is to be applied to providing outings on the water for the convalescent poor children of the city.

"Draw the deed of trust in such a way that the donor cannot at any time later withdraw his gift. Let there be three trustees—yourself (if you will be so good as to serve), myself, and a third to be selected by the other two."

Deaves stared. "And the newspaper story?" he murmured.

Evan read:

"It appears that Simeon Deaves has been the victim of an undeserved unpopularity. Instead of the soulless money-changer, as the popular view had it, an individual without a thought or desire in life except to heap up riches, he has placed himself in the ranks of our most splendid philanthropists by the creation of the Deaves Trust, the facts of which became known to-day.

"A sum approximating half a million dollars has been set aside for the purpose of providing fresh air excursions for the convalescent children of the poor. In the administration of the fund, Mr. Deaves has associated with himself Mr. Cornelius Verplanck, whose name is synonymous with good works. There is to be a third trustee, not yet named.

"The convalescent children of the poor! It would be difficult to think of a more praiseworthy object. To bring roses back to little pale cheeks, and the sparkle to dull eyes! Those who have thought harshly of Simeon Deaves owe him a silent apology. Perhaps while people reviled him, he has been carrying out many a good work in secret. Perhaps that was his way of enjoying a joke at the expense of his detractors.

"When approached to-day Mr. Deaves, with characteristic modesty, refused to say a word on the subject, referring all inquiries to his associate, Mr. Verplanck. Mr. Verplanck said: (Add interview Verplanck.)"

Deaves rose out of his chair. His gaze was a little wild. "Do you suppose—they would really print that—about my father?" he gasped.

"They say they will," said Evan with a disinterested air.

"I—I can't believe it. It's a joke of some kind."

"It's worth trying. They don't ask for anything."

"What am I to do?" cried Deaves distractedly.

"Put it up to your father."

"He would never consent."

"Why not? The money's gone anyway. He might as well have the reputation of a philanthropist. Won't cost any more."

"He *would* consent. That's the worst of it. He'd write that letter to Verplanck. Then as soon as Verplanck got the bonds he'd go to him and demand them back. There'd be a horrible scandal then."

This was a possibility that had not occurred to Evan. His spirits went down.

But George Deaves visibly nerved himself to make a resolution.

"I'll write the letter myself," he said. "I'll create the trust in papa's name. I won't tell him anything about it until it's too late for him to withdraw. He couldn't get the money back, anyhow, if I sent it to Verplanck as from myself."

Evan was quick to see the advantages of this arrangement, but he took care not to show too much eagerness. "Very good," he said, "if you are willing to take the responsibility."

A round, pink spot showed in either of Deaves's waxy cheeks.

"Willing!" he said, with more spirit than Evan had ever seen him display. "I'd do anything, *anything* to get such a story in the papers. It will make the family. And how pleased Mrs. Deaves will be."

Evan had his own ideas as to that, but he did not voice them.

Deaves wrote the letter.

"Would you mind posting it on your way out?" he said.

"I'll take it directly to Mr. Verplanck's office, since time is an object," said Evan casually.

"If you will be so good," said Deaves. A sudden terrified thought arrested him in the act of turning over the letter. "But suppose the bonds are not forthcoming?" he said. "Could Verplanck come down on me for them?"

"Certainly not," said Evan. "His concern in the matter doesn't begin until he gets the securities."

"Well, I'll take a chance," said Deaves, handing over the letter.

It is hardly necessary to state that Mr. Verplanck received both the letter and the bonds in short order.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. —

CONCLUSION.

THE Simeon Deaves story began to appear in the editions that came out at four o'clock that afternoon. Every paper in New York featured it. The clever rewrite men did their best on it, and the

accounts varied, though the main facts remained the same.

Many of the papers ran a two-column cut. Evan bought them all and retired to his room to await developments.

The first came in the shape of a note from George Deaves, reading:

The bonds were delivered to Mr. Verplanck shortly after my note. He telephoned me, and I have just returned from seeing him. I suggested you as the third member of the trust, to which he was agreeable. You will be in charge of the administration, and a proper salary will be paid you out of the fund. If you are agreeable please see Mr. Verplanck to-morrow at eleven. Papa has been out since lunch. I shall not mention to him that you had any foreknowledge of the affair, so he won't suspect any collusion between us.

G. D.

Evan answered:

I accept with pleasure.

Shortly after this Simeon Deaves turned up at Evan's room. It was evident as soon as he spoke that he had not yet read the afternoon papers. He had been drawn to Evan's room on his wanderings by his insatiable curiosity.

Nothing in the room escaped his sharp, furtive glances. The newspapers were lying about. Evan made no attempt to put them away. The old man had to learn soon, anyhow.

His glance was caught by his photograph in one of the sheets. He pounced on it. Evan watched him slyly. The old man's face was a study in astonishment.

"What's this?" he cried. "Do you know about it? Half a million for charity! Who got up this lie?" He was as indignant as if he had been accused of stealing the money.

"One of the papers mentioned the exact sum as four hundred thousand," said Evan innocently.

"It's a hoax."

"And they said United States government bonds, so I supposed the blackmailers must have turned over what they got from you."

"Why should they go to all that trouble just to give it to charity?"

Evan was careful to maintain his detached air. "Well, I thought maybe they were not common crooks, but socialists or anarchists or something like that, who believed in dividing things up, you know."

"The scoundrels!" cried the old man. "I'll put a stop to their game. I'll see Verplanck and get the bonds back."

"You can't see him to-day," said Evan carelessly. "It's after five. He lives in the country."

"I'll see him in the morning then."

"You'll have a chance to talk it over with your son in the meantime."

"What's George got to do with it? The money's mine."

"Of course," said Evan carelessly.

He let the old man rage on without interruption. When he saw his opportunity he said offhand: "Too bad to spoil this elegant publicity, though."

"What do you mean?"

"It's in all the papers. Every man in the country will read it before to-morrow morning. It will change your reputation overnight."

"What do I care about my reputation."

"If you call the scheme off, think how they'll get after you. Not only an obscure sheet like the *Clarion*, but the entire press of the country. Like a pack of hounds. They'll never let the story drop."

This thought gave the old man pause. He scowled at Evan.

Evan was making a pretense of cleaning a palette. "You'd hardly care to venture out in the street after that. You'd be hooted, stoned, perhaps. It's bad enough already.

"The reason you hired me was to prevent unpleasant experiences. But if every paper in town got after you—well, you couldn't go out except in a closed car."

The old man made a queer noise in his throat, and pulled at his seamy cheek.

Evan went on without appearing to notice him: "It's a swindle, of course, to try to make you out a philanthropist in spite of yourself. They must have a funny sense of humor. But I couldn't help but be struck by the opportunities for the right kind of publicity. You could turn it so easily to your own advantage."

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"Take this philanthropic trust, or what-

ever they call it; excursions for poor children. Good Lord! every sob-sister on the press would be good for a column once a week. It's up to you to see that the publicity is properly organized. Every time they give an excursion have the stuff sent out.

"It's cheap at the price, if you ask me. You couldn't buy it at any price. You'll be received with cheers on the street then. No need to hire a body-guard. And you still do more or less business. Think how it would help you in your business!"

The old man was greatly impressed. "Well, I'll think it over," he said. "It's too much money. I'll offer to compromise with Verplanck on half."

Evan saw that even this was an immense concession. "Talk it over with Mr. George," he said.

"Oh, George is a fool."

Evan, fearful of overdoing it, let the matter drop. Everything depended on George now. The old man presently departed.

It may be mentioned here, out of its proper place chronologically, that later that night Evan got another note from George Deaves:

I have had it out with papa. It took me two hours. But I won. There will be no interference with the Deaves Trust. In the future I mean to be firmer with papa. I have given in to him too much.

G. D.

At six o'clock Evan heard a quick, light step on the stairs, and the heart began to thump in his breast. He had been longing for this—and dreading it.

Corinna presented herself at his open door. She had newspapers in her hand, and there was no doubt but that she had read them. But if Evan had expected her to be pleased, he was sadly disappointed. Her eyes were flashing.

"What does this mean?" she demanded, waving the papers.

"Dordess wrote the story," said Evan, sparring for time.

"I know he did. I have seen him. He referred me to you."

"Well, the story tells all," said Evan. "I didn't return the bonds, but created a philanthropist out of Simeon Deaves."

"And rehabilitated him in the eyes of the public," she cried bitterly. "The unrepentant old scoundrel."

"He'll find popularity so sweet he'll have to live up to it."

"He doesn't deserve it."

Evan was moved to protest. "Look here, Corinna, you've nourished your grudge against him for so long that you've positively fallen in love with it. You're just sore now because it has been removed."

"I might have expected you to say that."

"Be fair, Corinna. I threshed my brains to find a way out that would do everybody good. And this is all the thanks I get."

"Much obliged, but I don't care to have anybody play Providence to me. I expect to be consulted in matters that concern me. Good for everybody, you say. How is the Deaves Trust good for me?"

"Why, the sum for supporting the excursions remains intact; the very sum you asked for."

"You've ousted me!"

"Not at all. What the papers do not state is that I have been appointed the third trustee, with power to administer the fund."

"What good will that do me?"

Evan said very offhand: "Well, I thought you were going to administer me."

He did not look at her as he said it. She gave him no sign. She was silent for so long that a great anxiety arose within him. Yet he felt that to speak again would only be to weaken his plea.

He looked at her. The shining head was studiously averted, the long lashes down.

Finally she said, low and firmly: "It is impossible."

"Why?" he demanded.

"You want a clinging vine," she said scornfully. "A tame woman who will look up to you as the source of all wisdom."

"If I did, would I be asking you?" he said dryly.

"You hope to tame me."

"Never! The shoe is on the other foot. You want a husband whose neck you can tread on."

"What difference does it make whose

fault it is?" she said wearily. "The fact remains we would quarrel endlessly and hatefully. It would be degrading."

"People who love each other always quarrel," said Evan cheerfully. "There's no harm in it."

She stared at him.

"Let us quarrel—and respect each other."

She shook her head. "You speak about it too coldly."

"Cold—I?" he said. "You silence me when you say that. You know I am not cold."

"It is better for us to part," she said, moving toward the door.

He hastened to get between her and the door. "Corinna, the reason I am obliged to fight you is because you wield such a dreadful power. In reality I am terrified of you. If you married me I would have no defenses at all. I would be at your mercy, because I love you so."

"You are always laughing at me," she murmured.

"I swear I am not. People who love do not make bargains, Corinna. All that I am or ever will be is yours. Take me and make what you can of it."

Corinna, who had not looked at him all this while, now turned a comical face of remonstrance. "But you mustn't," she said—"you mustn't give in to me like that! You must oppose my temper and my wilfulness, whatever I say."

It was Evan's turn to stare. Then he understood that this was surrender—Corinna's way. He laughed in pure delight and opened his arms. "Come here, you wretch!"

She sidled toward him, blushing deeply, intolerably confused.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A POSTSCRIPT.

TWO weeks later. The executive committee of the Deaves Trust was holding an informal meeting. Said Evan: "The Ernestina is in commission again, but of course we don't want her as long as the present skipper is in charge. I have found a new boat, the Thomas Higgins, safe and comfortable. The only thing against her is her name, and I propose to change that to Corinna.

"Silly!" said the other member of the committee.

"The owners have made me a fair price, and the other trustees have authorized me to purchase her outright."

"Won't that take all our money?"

"No, indeed. I have arranged to run her three days a week to the town of Redport, which wants a steamboat service with the city. The merchants of the town have guaranteed an amount of business sufficient to pay operating expenses and interest on the investment.

"In addition, on Thursdays and Sundays she will be available for charter. On Sundays we can always get a big price for her. So you see, we'll not only have our own steamboat, but our income, too."

"How clever you are," said Corinna.

"After I arranged about that I went to see Dordess—"

"Was he friendly?"—this anxiously.

"Yes, indeed. We understand each other now. I always was attracted to him, and he is resigned to the inevitable. He is content to be an uncle to our children."

"*Evan!*"

"He was to sound the other fellows, you know, and find out how they were disposed toward the new trips. Well, Anway and Tenterden decline with thanks. That was to be expected. But the others, Domville Burgess, Minturn, and that odd little chap in the gray suit with the big eyes—"

"Paul Roman."

"Yes, they're all crazy to come. They have accepted me as a necessary evil. The little fellow, Roman, came into Dordess's office while I was there. Shook hands with me like a little man.

"He has pluck, that kid. I will never forget the dogged way he trailed me. By the way, why did you never take him on the Ernestina?"

"We did, sometimes, and sometimes he remained on shore to trail Simeon Deaves. He made up as a girl, and you never spotted him. When you came aboard the Ernestina we had to hide him."

"The deuce you did!"

"What about Charley Straiker, Evan?"

"He's coming, too. Dear old Charl! We have had a heart-to-heart talk. Everything is fixed up between us. You have never told me how you got hold of him that day. I didn't like to ask him. Too sore a subject."

"There's nothing much to tell. I was in the library reading-room that morning, not to get the money, but just to watch out for danger. Paul Roman got the books out.

"I saw Charley come in and sit down beside him, and I knew what was up. I immediately went and sat down on the other side of Charley. He was glad to see me. I was quite frank with him. I introduced Paul Roman to him. I told him my story. It won his heart, that's all."

"It wasn't the story, but your eyes, confound them!"

"Oh, you never will believe that anybody can be influenced by disinterested motives."

"How did you find out that other time that the bills were marked?"

"Tenterden has a brother in a bank. He told us about the warning sent out by the Mid-City Bank."

"Corinna, how did you ever come to chum up with a woman like Maud Deaves?"

"I didn't chum up with her. I never laid eyes on the woman. It came about gradually. I found out early in the game that when we sent letters to her it had the effect of exerting a tremendous pressure on her husband to pay.

"Later, through the servants, whom Paul Roman had bribed for me, I found out that she was in money difficulties. After that every time we got the money I sent her part, and she worked for us like one of ourselves. We never failed to get the money one way or another, as you will remember."

"I know," said Evan ruefully."

"But don't let us talk of those times any more. It's a sore subject with me, too."

"One more question and I'll drop it forever. Confess that you came and took a room at 45A Washington Square for the especial purpose of seducing me."

"Evan! What a word to use!"

"I used it merely in a figurative sense, my child. Confess!"

"Well, of course, when Paul Roman reported all that had happened that day, and where you lived, and later when I learned through the Deaves servants that you had been engaged to go around with the old man, my first thought was to win you to our side. Paul reported that you were a gentleman, and seemed like a good sort of fellow."

"Oh, he did, did he!"

"In such a position, of course, if you were against us you could ruin everything, while if you were on our side you would be invaluable. So I went to that house and took a room, hoping to become acquainted with you,"

"You didn't stay long."

She looked at him through her lashes. "No, I fell in love with you, confound you! You spoiled everything!"

"Corinna!" he cried delightedly, "I am beginning to think I shall yet succeed in grafting a sense of humor on you!"

(The end.)

HURRY

BY KATHRYN WHITE RYAN

MY days are like stampeding spectral horses.
I can hear the clatter of their hoofs as they rush by me,
But in the dust I cannot see them.
If I should pause or should relax or step aside
They—they—would trample me.

Mr. Mister

by

Thomas Thursday

THE bird who slips you the idea that he's the eighth wonder of the world couldn't convince a squirrel that nuts are good. I'm positive that the flipper who thinks he's It, tagged himself by slanting in a mirror. Anyway, who peddled the world the idea that the female is vainer than the male, hey? Don't tell it to a camera man! That's me.

I had no more than wiggled on board a job with Plunko Pictures than I was made aware of the presence of Chesterfield Criddle, the same being what they call a leading man. But you'll have to show me! He couldn't lead a parrot to a biscuit factory. But I'll admit at once and immediately that Chesterfield's looks could tie those collared birds without getting winded, having a face that was O.K.—till he opened it.

The first three days that I was on the job I did nothing but get out of his way, and listen to him tell Director Jimmie Muffoon that he couldn't direct a rabbit to a cabbage patch.

Well, one morning the well-known mail slipped Jimmie a scenario that contained enough thrills to make a desperado call it a sunset. It was from the New York office, and I'll say now that they must have selected the same while the lights were out.

"Looks like the real stuff, Oscar," says Jimmie, handing me a copy. "Have a slant at it."

It was called "The Clammy Clue," and was scrambled up by a bird named Van Camp Addle. It started off something like this:

Artemus Reem, accountant, comes to New York to investigate the books of Penn & Parker, bankers. Stops at hotel. That night Artemus is tapped on the knob with a monkey-wrench, or something, and is discovered the next morning by bell-hop. Bell-hop hops down and tells clerk, clerk tells manager, manager tells police. Police must have told it to Sweeney, because when they inspect the room they don't find trace of anything but two cigars that Artemus had in his pocket. Leave it to them. Captain is as puzzled as a cross-eyed eel and wastes about twenty feet of film rubbing his bean. Bright stuff. Like charcoal in a tunnel. You'll say so.

Enter now the woman in the case. You might expect the same, sooner or later. This happened to be sooner.

While friend captain is jazzing around the room, in floats Anice Milland who happened to be camping in the adjoining apartment. Anice is described by Van Camp as one of those dashing young blondes. Where they get that stuff from, I don't know. Guess they mean a dash of peroxid, hey? Well, I could see right away that our staress, Lulu Lovegood, née Marbelle Header, was slated to play Anice. But to go on with the story: Soon as Anice pipes Artemus doing a Rip Van Winkle on the floor, she registers fear, surprise, emotion, agitation, and then wants to know if anything happened!

And right there I'll give Van Camp credit for knowing just what a blond lady would do under the circumstances. Captain

squints at her from under a set of bushy eyebrows—that should have been on his chin—and becomes suspicious. Ha! thinks he, this dame knows what's what and who's who! He questions Anice till she's as groggy as a phone operator, then takes her to headquarters. Anice sprinkles a few tears over the chief's desk and claims that she can't say a word, but says she's innocent of everything but being the daughter of a millionaire.

Chief lets Anice go home to papa. Mystery begins to get as thick as glue, and everybody goes up in the air. Enter now one Tod Tracer, the famous detective. You might guess that this bird is due to solve the case, be the hero, do the grand-stand stuff and, somehow, marry Anice. Right away I could see where Mr. Criddle was gonna play the part of T. Tracer. Well, the scenario went on to cheep that Tod sniffed around the room, looked wise for a few moments, and then sniffed out. And I'll say no detective ever had anything on Mr. Tracer. What do you suppose that gent did? Oh, he merely dashed down to the offices of Penn & Parker, told Mr. Penn that he wished to open a large account, and promised to return later with the money. Return he did—but not at the stated time. He arrived at two A.M. Is received by the watchman—who chanced to be awake—watchman, in turn, receives a tap on the noodle, after which friend Tracer takes a trick key from his pocket and enters the offices. In twenty seconds he has the safe door as wide open as Alaska—they do it in the movies—and yanks out the books.

Discovers from said books that some bird in the firm was buying at least one new apartment house per day with the depositors' coin. Which same you'll say is a new idea. Like "Way Down Easy Lynne," or "Ten Fights in a Bar Room."

The rest is as slow as a turtle, with the exception of the mob scene, which takes place in the offices of Penn & Parker soon as the enraged depositors find they've been defrauded.

Take it from me, Van Camp Addle couldn't write home for money. Not that I'm knocking, understand. But I'll leave it to you if Old Sleuth couldn't hatch out a better gem than that with a hunk of chalk and a slate.

"Listen, Jimmie," I says, "what's this supposed to be—a comedy?"

"Certainly not, Oscar. That's high-class mellerdrammer. Don't you know what real litterchoor is?"

"Maybe not," I hurled back. "But that stuff is old enough to tell about the landing of Columbus! What do you think, Chesterfield?" I asked, turning to the new star.

No answer. He stroked his puzzle mustache fondly and kept on reading like I was out in Honolulu or Sweden.

"I say, Old Timer," I went on, "what do you think of the new scenario, hey?"

"My name, sir, to you, is *Mister* Criddle," he drawled. "Besides, I rarely enter converse with those who are not familiar with the arts."

I admit that I stood with my mouth as wide open as Broadway used to be, and couldn't say a word. I felt like telling him that if his mustache had a handle it would make a corking toothbrush, but didn't.

Just then Lulu Lovegood breezed in, dabbing a little lady flour on her nose as she entered, and slipped us all a smile that would have made Dante melt. And I'll say that Lulu was not so many yards behind Cleopatra when it came to looks. She was between twenty-five and common-sense and owned a pair of eyes that would have made any man leave home. You get me, one of those infant-faced dames that the college professors marry to make 'em forget what they know. Meaning the professors, not the Lulu's.

"Hello, folks!" she cheeped. "I hear we got a new thriller. When do we shoot it?"

"It's dead already," I chimed in.

"To-morrow, Miss Lovegood," says Jimmie. "And it's a peach! It's called 'The Clammy Clue,' and there's enough action to suit the Marines. Real litterchoor, and it ought to go great out in Kneecap, Nebraska, and such like. You'll play the dashing young heroine, while Mr. Criddle takes the part of the dare-devil detective. See?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Muffoon," says

Chesterfield, " but I think it most desirable to revise that Tracer character considerably. I note that his mannerisms are unduly vulgar, you know. It is quite difficult for a gentleman of breeding and culture to grasp the spirit of such affairs."

See what I mean? That was him all over. He didn't think no more of himself than a second loot thinks of mirrors, and was just as democratic as the Sultan. He claimed that he was a direct descendent of one of the five hundred thousand who rocked over on the Mayflower and disturbed the Indians.

" Well, Oscar," says Jimmie, soon as Chesterfield blew out, " what do you think of the new star?"

" I ain't saying anything, Jimmie; but, grab it from me, there's something phony about all those Mister guys. I never bumped one yet who didn't take a header down-hill sooner or later."

" Well, you know what that artistic temperament is, Oscar. Besides, I got orders from New York to go easy with the bunch."

" Artistic temperament, hey?" I says. " Believe me, that's old Benjamin B. Bunk himself! The birds who flop in the battle of life all fall back on that artistic stuff. Did you ever hear of a plumber with anything like that hanging on to him?"

" Meaning what?"

" Meaning that friend A. Temperament is nothing but a yard of laziness played to the tune of ' The Whole World's Wrong.' If a guy is a frost he tries to get thawed out by taking a home-run fit and somersaulting into imaginary hysterics. Forget it, Jimmie! This here Chesterfield flipper has a cluck sound to his make-up somewhere and he's due to make a lead-nickel echo before long."

The next morning Jimmie told me to go down to the " yard " and yank out about twenty extras for the mob scene. I found enough birds there to raise a couple of armies. Long ones with short faces, and short ones with long faces, and the like. I selected the best of the bunch and paraded them up to the studio. One bird attracted my attention at a single glance. He looked as hard as the Rocky Mountains and seemed to be between twenty-seven and a rough life. At the window he gave his name as Purcell Agnew Crimpit. Profession: bricklayer. Mr. Crimpit claimed to be on strike for skyer wages, or something, and was willing to cop off a few extra cherries by honoring the movies with his personal appearance. According to Purcell's own cheep, some bean had told him that he was a " type," and ought to make a hit. If so, good-by bricklaying.

Well, we got the first set ready, the one where Artemus is found in the hotel room. Jimmie picked Purcell to play the part, since it didn't require much acting to lay still on the floor.

I was about to shoot the set when Chesterfield butted in.

" My dear Mr. Muffoon," he says, " is it possible that you are employing a common extra to characterize such a delicate interpretation?"

" Well," replied Jimmie, " I didn't think it required much talent to play the part of a dead man."

At the sound of the talking, Purcell Agnew rolled over to see what was going on. When he got a slant at Chesterfield, he registered six kinds of surprise and a couple of scowls. Ditto Mr. Criddle.

" Oh, well, suit your own plebeian tastes!" snorted Chesterfield, and raced out.

" Who's that guy?" asked Purcell from the floor. " The Emperor of the World?"

" That's our leading man, Mr. Chesterfield Criddle," says Jimmie.

" Oh, yeah?" cheeped Purcell. " I may be mistooken, but that bird looks familiar."

After we shot the set, he came up to me and got curious.

" Listen," he says, " what did you say that fellow's name was, huh?"

" Chesterfield Criddle--*Mister* Criddle," I told him.

" He musta stole that off a Pullman!"

" Maybe," I says.

" Know anything good about 'im?" he wants to know.

" Nope."

" Uhuh," he grunted, and breezed away.

Chesterfield's first appearance came in

the same set, where he comes into the room to discover who harmed Artemus.

"Now, my man," he says to me, "when I give the order to crank, crank—not before. I assume that you understand?"

"I ain't taking orders from nobody but Mr. Muffoon," I fired at 'im. "See?"

"Well, I had an idea that I was supposed to be the director," mumbled poor Jimmie, fingering his ear.

"To be suah—to be suah!" says Chesterfield. "But when one has studied the art of cinematography as I have, is it not feasible to suppose that my assistance is inestimable?"

"Aw, trow the machine at 'im!" hissed Purcell in my ear.

Further gabbing was interrupted by Lulu dashing in dressed up like a jeweler's window. She was wearing one of those $2.75 evening gowns that must have been made with less than a yard of cloth, and looked altogether great.

"Ah, Miss Lovegood," drawled Chesterfield. "How charming. But I'm afraid that your apparel is somewhat *outré*. Not suited to the occasion, as it were. May I not suggest that you change to a more modest attire?"

I expected Lulu to toss a tripod at Mr. Criddle, but what do you suppose that dame says? And I'll leave it to you, if some poor flipper said that to his wife, she'd battle him all over the works.

"Oh, thank you so much!" she purred, killing him with a spring morning smile. "Really, it's so nice to have some one in the studio possessing the artistic taste. I will do as you suggest." Exit Lulu.

"I will now have but one rehearsal," went on Chesterfield, turning to Jimmie, "showing my own conception of a talented detective investigating a hotel room for evidence of crime. And I will permit you, Mr. Muffoon, to call my attention to anything that appears to you as misinterpretations."

He then walked into the set, looked it over a moment, after which he took out one of those riddle spy-glasses and piped the carpet. And I'll say now that a Hindu could give a better imitation of "A Swan Dance in B Flat" than Chesterfield did of a detective. Next, he held an imaginary conversation with the captain, captain shakes head, and Chesterfield walked out. Wonderful stuff. Like shooting off fireworks while wearing a celluloid collar.

"Satisfactory, Mr. Muffoon?"

"Great!" says Jimmie.

I felt a poke in the ribs; it was Purcell. "I got a canary home what kin do better 'n that," he buzzed. "If that guy's a' actor, then I won the war!"

During the shooting of the next ten sets I noticed that Chesterfield frowned each time he came near Purcell, while Purcell kept looking him over as if he was for sale. And then one night Chesterfield ambled up to Jimmie and demanded to know who selected the extras.

"I refer especially to that uncouth person—the one who seems to stare at me so constantly."

"Who?" asked Jimmie.

"The person with the red hair and extremely vulgah personality. It's quite irritating, to be suah."

"I guess you mean Purcell, Mr. Criddle."

"Is that the fellow's name? Well, I wish you'd keep him out of my sight as much as possible."

"Can you beat that?" asked Jimmie soon as Chesterfield blew. "First thing you know that bird will object to the color of the sky."

"Never mind, Jimmie," I says, "I ain't no fortune-teller, but I expect something to happen in the quickly approaching future."

Comes now the mob scene. You remember, the part where the irate depositors swoop down on the works and mop up. On that morning I marshaled all the extras into the studio where Jimmie gave them the dope on what to do.

"Gentlemen," says Jimmie, addressing the bunch, "what we want is considerable action. No namby-pamby stuff goes. Get me? Soon as I give the signal you guys crash down the door and disarrange the furniture. Never mind a couple of bumps on the nose. Make it real. See? When you get in, dash around looking for Penn & Parker. Remember that they're the birds who have been spending your hard-earned coin—without your permission. Try to

imagine that each one of you has been defrauded outa about two thousand each—I know you never even *heard* of that much but try to imagine it. Get me? Well, with that happy thought in your mind, you discover Mr. Penn hiding behind a desk. You spend a few moments shaking fists at 'im and then you lose control of your temper and shake up Mr. Penn like a scenic railway. While you're exercising with Mr. Penn, the great detective, Tod Tracer, comes in and demands quietness. You stop and listen to what Tracer has to say—and that's all."

"Just a moment, Mr. Muffoon," crashed in Purcell, "who's gonna take the part of Penn, the bird who gets walloped for a three-bagger?"

"Well, I can't think of a better man than you. It means a little extra cash, you know. And the boys won't really hurt you, understand? All you've gotta do is to make out you're being hurt, see? Now, run into the prop-room and tell Hennesey to rig you out in a nifty business suit, and tell 'm to stick a mustache under your nose. Hurry!"

While Purcell was being fixed up Chesterfield strolled in and inspected the works.

"All ready, Mr. Muffoon?"

"Yep."

"And the—er—fight, I take it, will be stopped by a signal from you? I mean to say, although it will appear as if I had caused the lull in hostilities, you are to instruct the extras, at my entrance, to cease action?"

"Yeah, that's right," says Jimmie. "Everything's mapped out O. K."

Purcell breezed in and took his place at the desk.

"Now, remember," says Jimmie, "you're sitting at the desk looking over accounts, see? You're kinda nervous because you know you've been cheating honest folks outa hard-earned cash. Get me?"

"Gotcher!" says Purcell.

"Now, you guys," went on Jimmie to the extras, "get behind that drop, near the entrance, and when I say "Enter!" you crash down the door and confront the man at the desk. He'll look surprised for a moment, and then attempt to go to his hip-pocket for a gun. When he does that you start to treat 'im rough. Not rough, understand. But make it *look* rough.

"Ready, Oscar?"

"Let's go!" I snapped.

"Shoot!"

I whirled the old handle, and Purcell didn't look half bad at the desk. From behind the drop I could hear the mob muttering and mumbling.

"All right, boys—enter!" cheeped Jimmie.

And I'll say that the battle of Bull Chase had nothing on that entrance. Down went the door, after which the finest collection of drivers, ex-bartenders, and plumbers in the world crashed into the room. The first bird to enter picked up a chair and tossed it over his head onto the bean of some poor flipper who chanced to be looking elsewhere. Next, some iron-worker yanked the carpet off the floor and upset about ten piano-movers.

"Take it easy!" shouted Jimmie. "Take it easy—the war's over!"

They paid less attention to Jimmie than they would to a stuffed crow. Some bird jumped for the trick chandeliers, and they managed to anchor on Purcell's head.

"Hey! you guys lay off the rough stuff," snarled Purcell. "Whaddaya—"

Wham! Purcell Agnew Crimpit was interrupted by six gents falling onto him like he was the mint, and proceeded to roll him over the floor.

"Kinda rough, Jimmie," I says, cranking away.

"Yeah; kinda rough is right."

"Get off me neck!" howled Purcell. "Get off me neck!"

"Ready, Mr. Criddle," says Jimmie. "Here's where you dash in and calm the angry waters."

Chesterfield replaced his handkerchief up his sleeve and walked to the back drop.

"That's enough, boys," shouted Jimmie. "Tod Tracer is about to enter. Ready—stop!"

Nothing stirring. Take it from me, that bunch of alley-bandits were enjoying themselves like they never did before. Chairs to the right, pictures to the left, and desks to the middle. Then ten of 'em sat all over

Purcell, and that gent squeaked for mercy. Chesterfield entered with one of those "Cease-this-affair-at-once" looks, and the bunch fell back. The star ambled to Purcell and stood looking at him as stern as a pilgrim.

And then it happened.

Soon as Purcell got half a slant at Chesterfield, he wrapped his legs around Mr. Criddle's shins and caused that bird to flop over like a tent in a cyclone. Not a word said Purcell Agnew. The next thing we knew Chesterfield was being rolled around the floor, with Purcell doing the rolling. Now and then he'd step on the star's chest, twist his nose and the like.

"Hey! cut it," hissed Jimmie. "That ain't my instructions."

"Help! Police!" howled the star.

Bam! Purcell started a left-hand swing from the carpet, aimed at Chesterfield's chin, missed same by a yard, and it crashed against the desk. While Purcell was sucking his injured hand, Chesterfield dashed out.

I stopped cranking and went over with Jimmie to see what happened to Purcell.

"Well, you poor flounder!" raved Jimmie. "Whaddaya mean by breaking up the works, hey?"

"I'm satisfied," says Purcell, feeling a couple of bumps on his bean. "Now I'm even."

"Even?" asked Jimmie, puzzled.

"Yeah—even! I've been looking for a chance to crack Mike for more 'n five years, I have!"

"Whose Mike—Mr. Criddle?" I demanded.

"Mr. Criddle me grandmother! That bird's right name is Mike Maloney, and he owes me mother nine weeks' board, and I told ma I'd run across him some day and get it. And I think I'll chase out and collect now."

See what I mean?

Just Like a Jane

by James W. Egan

IN the parlor sat Rufus, fingering his brilliant purple scarf and stealing glances at the clock. Up-stairs in her room, Mabel was making final flickers with the powder rag and giving her suit the critical once-over for perhaps the hundredth time.

Rufus Croy was taking Mabel to the show. It was early in the week to be stepping out—only Tuesday night—but the young man had passes he wanted to utilize. An advertising solicitor on an afternoon newspaper, Rufus seldom paid anything but the government tax when he enjoyed places of amusement.

Just as Mr. Croy had definitely concluded they would be late, Mabel appeared. At that moment the telephone in the dining-room rang. Mrs. Whitted, Mabel's mother, responded.

"Oh, Mabel!" she called. "Somebody to speak to you."

Mr. Croy scowled meaningly at the clock.

"Oh, bother!" The girl shook her head annoyedly. "Who is it, mother?"

"It's Glen, dear."

"Oh, darn it! What does he want to call up now for?"

Apparently Mabel was quite cross about it, but she excused herself to go out in the dining-room. Her chat with "Glen" must have been very brief, for she was back in the parlor before Rufus became restless.

"Curses! One of me hated rivals, I suppose?" Mr. Croy grinned as they passed out of the house.

"Just Glen." Mabel drew on her gloves.

"Trying to make a date to take you to the Ladies' Aid, I'll bet," brightly observed Mr. Croy. "I don't understand how a girl can let a bird as slow as he is stick around. What's his fatal attraction, Mabel?"

"Oh, Glen is a nice fellow, Rufey. Of course he's awfully dull and poky, but he's good-looking, don't you think?"

"Is he now? Say, didn't you ever give me the over and across?"

Mabel laughed, and switched the topic. Although she wasn't hinting it to Rufus, the girl had one splendid feminine reason for maintaining friendly relations with Glen Hardy. That "dull and poky" young man was madly in love with her, and she knew it. Several times he had mentioned marriage, and nowadays a girl cannot afford to let a chap like this get entirely away from her. None of her other young men friends—among whom Rufus Croy must be numbered—seemed matrimonially adventurous.

For that matter, Mabel herself wasn't in haste to march to the altar. She enjoyed a good time, and had made up her mind to postpone the Mendelssohn music as long as possible. "Stepping out" appealed to her—although she was careful not to let her feet slip. It really was exciting to have a dozen admirers and dates with different fellows nearly every night of the week.

Although he had the reputation of being naughty at times, young Mr. Croy was one of Mabel's favorite swains. Rufus dressed elegantly, had his own line of merry banter, and was so full of snap and jazz that an evening with him never was stupid.

The couple arrived late at the theater. It was to a vaudeville house Rufus had received passes, and the serial picture feature was just celluloiding to a thrilling conclusion.

As they wormed their way to seats the curtain arose for the regular bill and three more or less pulchritudinous maids tripped forth in light terpsichorean measure.

"Recruits from the packing industry," murmured Rufus, getting into form immediately. "No wonder beef is so high."

"They look heavy on their feet," Mabel criticized. "I think I could dance as well myself—Rufey! What date is this?"

"Why? What's wrong?" Mr. Croy manifested some surprise at his companion's tone.

"Oh, I—I just wondered!"

"It's the twenty-seventh, I believe."

"Oh, no! No, it can't be! I mean—"

"Say!" Mr. Croy was puzzled. "Why the emotion? Forget something? Tell me what this date means in your fair young life. I tremble with eagerness."

"Don't be silly! There's nothing—I mean I should have turned out some work to-day, and I didn't remember it. How could I have forgotten?"

"Cheer up! Work is for slaves. Lincoln freed the slaves. So don't worry. I never do. Get your cotton ready. One of the corn-feds is about to erupt into song. Come on, Mabel, get the old pep back and we'll have a swell time roasting the show or something."

"Oh, I'm not worrying!" said the girl in the light-hearted manner of an ancient Spanish don being forced to promenade the plank from the poop-deck of his own galleon.

Mabel had fibbed a little to Mr. Croy. No memory of work left undone so suddenly had upset her. It was something far more serious. Much too serious to be put out of mind.

This was the evening of the twenty-seventh—the night of all nights Harold Ashcourt had solemnly abjured her not to forget! Why had she failed to keep in closer touch with her calendar?

Harold Ashcourt was another of Mabel's admirers, a burly young plumber with a craze for dancing. And the twenty-seventh was the date of the Plumbers and Steamfitters' Annual Ball, which she promised to at-

tend under Harold's protecting escort. To make matters worse, Harold was a quick-tempered fellow with pugilistic leanings, and particularly despised Rufus Croy! If he learned she had turned him down to go to a show with the advertising solicitor—she knew it would appear to him in that light—the husky plumber would be in a murderous mood.

What a little fool to forget that date! Of course it had been made a week before, and Harold might have rung up to refresh her memory. He was not without blame himself. If he hadn't cared enough to call her on the wire—

And now Mabel recollected her mother had mentioned somebody telephoning just before she returned home from the office. Undoubtedly Harold! Failing to get her then, he might have taken for granted she was going with him. He might be calling at the house for her now! A cold chill ran through the girl. This was apt to be a dreadful mess.

"What's the idea of the big trance?" Mr. Croy spoke in tones the least bit sour. "Still repining over the unfinished toil, little Ida Industry?"

"Oh, Rufey, I—I'm getting a headache." Poor Mabel nervously twisted her program.

"Can't blame you much. The show's the bunk so far. Hope this next sketch is better. Has a lovely title."

The girl glanced at the rumpled sheet in her hands. Feature "E" was a playlet labeled "Jealousy." Mabel shuddered.

Her shudders continued throughout the next few minutes. The sketch was wild melodrama, with the lid off and far flung. The plot concerned a girl and two men. Each of the masculine adored the fair feminine, who seemed a coquettish damsel.

For some ten minutes the lady of the sketch lied to her lovers and played with their hearts as only melodramatic maidens can. At length one of the men—portrayed by an actor oddly reminiscent of the husky Harold Ashcourt—learned the woman had broken a promise for the sake of the other fellow. He went into a mad frenzy conceived by the author, and managed to unearth a revolver.

Mabel followed the actor's moves with bated breath. The woman and other man were at the theater—oh, ironic comparison!—and the vengeful individual announced he would wait. Behind a portière he concealed himself. The unsuspecting pair drifted in. The man kissed the woman and had turned away when Nemesis burst from his hiding-place. A revolver barked, and a poor chap succumbed as he had succumbed matinée and night for many long weeks.

Two shrill screams resounded through the theater. One—by far the feebler—emanated from the fickle lady of the footlights; the other pierced the eardrums of the astounded Mr. Croy. Mabel had lost control of herself.

"What are you yelling for?" slipped from the young man. "Good Heavens, Mabel, what's the matter? You're white's a sheet! You ain't—"

"Take me home, Rufus—please! I'm not well. I want to go home right away!"

"Funny!" Mr. Croy muttered between his teeth, but he assisted the girl with her coat and helped plow a way to the aisle. Curious gazes from many patrons followed the pair as they disappeared through an exit, but ten seconds later the audience had forgotten them.

Once outside, Mabel searched the surroundings with anxious eyes. No burly plumber was in sight, and she drew a relieved breath.

"My head is aching dreadfully!" she attempted to explain to her escort.

"Maybe you think mine isn't!" he growled under his tongue.

The journey home was not joyous. Mrs. Whitted had retired for the night, and Mabel bid Rufus a hasty good-by at the door.

"Thank you so much for being patient with me, Rufey," she said. "I hope nothing happens to you."

"Why should anything happen to me?" he demanded. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing. I'm just silly, Rufus—don't know what I'm saying. But please take care of yourself, won't you? Good night."

"Sure I will. Good night."

Mr. Croy went away shaking his head. Just when a guy figures he has a skirt all

doped out, something happens to show him all wrong. Mabel's behavior was as unexpected as it was inexplicable. "Just like a Jane," he growled.

"A hell of an evening," he summed it up.

Mabel's first act after entering the house was to awake her mother.

"You're home early, dear," Mrs. Whitted commented. "What do you want?"

"Mother, did Harold Ashcourt call to see me to-night?"

"No, dear. But somebody called up just after you had gone out. He wouldn't give me his name, but he seemed a bit angry because you weren't home, and hung up quickly. It might have been Harold."

"I'll bet it was Harold. Oh, darn the luck!"

"What's the matter, dear? Anything wrong?"

"Oh, no, mother. I have a terrible headache. I guess I'd better go to bed."

Mabel failed to sleep much. Worry kept her awake most of the night. The combination of circumstances and the impression left by the wretched playlet contrived to put her nerves on a ragged edge. She arose pale and haggard the next morning.

"You don't look well, dear," her mother asserted. "Are you sure you want to go down to the office?"

"Oh, yes, mother. My headache kept me awake. I—I guess I'll be all right."

Breakfast was almost over when the telephone rang. Mabel, acting on a hunch, went to the instrument. A lady was at the other end of the wire. It proved to be Rufus Croy's older sister, who kept house for the young man.

"I'm so worried!" she informed Mabel. "Rufus didn't come home last night. I found his room empty when I went to call him this morning, and everything untouched."

"Oh, my God!" The receiver nearly fell from Mabel's limp fingers.

"What did you say?" Miss Croy's nervous accents buzzed in her air. "Did he say where he was going after leaving you last night? He never did anything like this before!"

"He was all right—when he left me," Mabel stammered. "I—I thought he was going straight home."

"Perhaps he has been hurt. Oh, dear! I'm so upset! If you hear anything please call me up."

"I will—and you do the same for me, won't you?"

A little later, very pale and wan, Mabel came back to the breakfast table. She explained briefly to her mother, and Mrs. Whitted wondered audibly what could have happened to Rufus.

"Ah, he's old enough to take care of himself!" the girl flashed finally, and hurried away to put on her things.

Ordinarily an efficient and capable employee, Mabel was a grief and trial to her superiors that morning. She was so worried and nervous that she couldn't do her work justice, and was given some sarcastic advice to use her nights for sleeping.

Just before noon Miss Croy called her up.

"My brother is in the emergency hospital," came the direful message. "He was picked up, unconscious, at the head of an alley this morning, with his head all cut. He just came to a few minutes ago and told them who he was. He wants to see you, the nurse says. He mentioned your name. Oh, dear, dear! I don't know what to do!"

"I'll go to the hospital right away." Mabel, her brain reeling, hung up. What she had dreaded and expected, yet had been loath to believe would occur, had come to pass. Harold Ashcourt had wreaked his madness upon poor Rufus Croy.

Prompted by sudden impulse, the girl rang up the widow with whom the plumber boarded, and asked for Harold.

"He ain't here," she was told. "I was away yesterday afternoon and don't know whether he came home for supper or not. But he wasn't in last night, and I found some of his things gone this morning. He didn't leave no word, neither."

"Thank you!" Mabel said a little unsteadily. The proof against the plumber was almost conclusive. After the assault on Rufus he had taken flight, of course. There could be no gainsaying the facts.

A haggard young woman appeared at the emergency hospital a few minutes later, only to learn that Rufus Croy had re-

lapsed into unconsciousness again. Although she notified her employer she would not be back to work and remained at the hospital all afternoon with Miss Croy, the injured young man did not come to his senses. Weary and sick, Mabel went home for supper.

The girl felt it her duty to inform the police, yet she shrank from the task. Though morally certain of what had taken place, she yet had no actual proof. Until Rufus recovered enough to tell his story she must hold her peace. Yet suppose he were never to recover! The doctors agreed his injury was serious. Apparently he had been hit over the head with a heavy weapon, and concussion of the brain was feared.

Mabel needed advice, and sympathy. She thought of Glen Hardy. Somehow, his cool capability and his known devotion to her seemed to make him the one man to turn to. She called him up and had him come over after the evening meal.

To Glen the girl made a clean breast of the wretched affair.

"Oh, Glen, if Rufus dies, I'll feel I helped murder him!" she cried, in conclusion.

"You must not feel so badly, Mabel." Glen was very tender. "We must not jump to conclusions, either. I'll admit things look bad for Harold, but he may not have done this. Of course, an angry man will do many regrettable things, still this—"

"I never was so unhappy in my life!" she sobbed.

Glen was not the fastest worker in the world, but he could recognize a golden moment when it came drifting along. He talked seriously to Mabel, and told her a lot of things he might not have dared at other times. And for once the girl listened seriously. She was still wretched when the young man left that night; yet her misery was not acute as it might have been. Something had happened to temper her sorrow.

Upon retiring Mabel made a disquieting discovery. A valuable locket—an heirloom from her grandmother in which she had placed her own picture—was missing from around her neck. How long it had been gone she did not know. Probably since the trip to the theater. She had been too excited to notice. Misfortunes seemed never to come in small bunches.

Late the next day Rufus Croy came back to reality. His sister and Mabel were at his bedside, and he smiled recognition.

"I wanted to see you, Mabel," he whispered faintly. "You know, I failed to take your advice—and something happened to me, all right. You must have had a hunch."

"I guess I did." Mabel's lips trembled. "What happened—did you recognize him?"

"Him? Whom do you mean?"

"Now, do not talk too much and get excited. It's bad for you, Mr. Croy," warned a nurse.

"Oh, I'll stand it, I think," Rufus said. "I hope they get that cowardly driver. Have the paper look for him—struck me down and left me unconscious."

"Driver?"

"Yes. I was hit by a speeding machine that came tearing out of an alley as I was crossing the street. I was dashed head first against the curbing, I guess, and knocked cold. That's how I was found, they tell me. One doctor thought I was hit with a club, but that wasn't it. I'd like to get my hands on that yellow dog!"

"Oh!" breathed Mabel. "Oh!"

"If I had been paying attention, I might have escaped," Rufus confessed, "but I guess I must have been wondering about you. It's very good of you to come here and visit me, Mabel. I don't deserve it. I have something of yours that I was going to keep, but I want to give it back now—as soon as I can. Your locket. When I was putting on your coat for you in the show the chain broke and it slipped into my hands. I said nothing, for I wanted to keep your picture. But I know you think a lot of that locket—and I'm sorry."

"That's all right, Rufey." Mabel patted his hand.

"I wanted to tell you."

"You've talked too much. You must keep quiet a while!" the nurse ordered.

Mabel left the hospital with her mind more at ease than it had been for many hours. Whatever the cause of Harold Ashcourt's disappearance, it wasn't the attempted murder of Rufus Croy.

"I guess I let my silly thoughts run away on account of that terrible play," she confided to Glen that evening. He was visiting her again. "I'm so glad what I imagined didn't happen. The doctors say now, Rufus isn't hurt so badly, and is sure to get well in a short time."

"And then he'll fall in love with you, no doubt?"

"Silly!" Mabel pinched his arm. "He knows too many girls for that. I wonder what happened to Harold, though? That part of it is strange."

Perhaps it was coincidence, but the telephone rang at that moment. Mabel darted to the instrument.

"Is this Mabel?" buzzed the bass accents of the husky plumber himself.

Mabel said it was.

"I want to apologize for turnin' you down on that dance," Harold uttered. "It wasn't my fault I couldn't be there. Late Tuesday afternoon the boss got a rush job in a plant out of town. Water-pipes all busted, and we had to leave in a hurry. I called up, but you wasn't home, so I thought I'd have time again before I took the train. But by the time I went to the boardin'-house and got a few things I couldn't make it—and there wasn't anybody there, either. I just got back and I wanted to tell you."

"It's good of you to call up, Harold."

"You ain't sore about it, are you?"

"Oh, no; not a bit!"

"Perhaps I can make up for it some time?"

"Perhaps you can. Thank you ever so much for calling up."

Mabel replaced the receiver.

"Well?" teased Mr. Hardy.

"It seems to have ended that way," the girl remarked. "And now, Glen, I guess we can finish discussing that bungalow you planned. Do you think four rooms and a bath—"

Which observation ought to help explain why Mabel no longer has a date with a different fellow nearly every night of the week and has cut down the list of her admirers to one mere male.

The Shuffle Trick

by Charles W. Tyler

ELISHA CROWNINSHIELD leaned over the zigzag rail fence that had for its beginning the corner of a faded red barn, and smiled at the world. In an aged and battered wallet that reposed securely in an inner pocket of his vest there was a package of bills—six hundred and fifty-five dollars. Money that represented, besides the toil of its actual earning, piecemeal savings of weeks and months—money that had meant the doing without of little luxuries, even the denial of many things that serve to lessen the daily burden.

But in the mind of Elisha Crowninshield now there were only thoughts of tomorrow, and the gladness that then would come to himself and the partner of his life, Sophy, in the knowledge that at last the farm was their own. Six hundred dollars

and the interest for six months—and their home would be title clear.

Other days there would be in which to once more lay away their small savings for the gray years that were creeping upon them—savings that would keep them when their hard day's work was done, and give them a little rest on sunset trail before the last going home.

Time was getting on, and the man and the woman had the marks of the uphill battles written plainly on their faces, though always there remained the kindly, patient lines that a life of toil had not erased.

Down the road a cloud of dust was stirred into a lazy existence, while a team jogged into view around a bend. The eyes of the man by the fence watched its coming with mild interest. A few moments later a sightly rig had drawn up before him.

"Howdy, friend!" greeted the stranger. "Nice day!"

Elisha bowed, and, in accord with the gladness that was in his heart, said:

"Finest I've seen, and because it is I'm taking a few minutes to just enjoy it."

The gentleman in the buggy shot a swift, appraising glance at the farmer, and a moment later flung an equally estimating eye toward the buildings and the orchard near by, with its pink-white blossoms.

The farmhouse and barns were well kept, the apple-trees carefully trimmed. The place was not that of a poor man, nor yet that of a wealthy farmer. To the mind of the stranger it represented the home rather of a careful man—and such men always had a *little* laid by.

Many years in the lanes of the confidence or bunco game had taught "Straight" Jake Manning much anent appearances. The man of poverty was nearly always plainly so marked; he had nothing, or what little he did have was on his back. The man of wealth was not always so defined by the clothes he wore, but more often by his intelligence and bearing; he was too shrewd for ordinary swindling games. The careful man lived his part, both as to dress and the things that came under his care; he was nearly always willing to at least *listen* to schemes that promised well; too, he was something of a dreamer, and, accordingly, good material to work on.

Bewhiskered and of doleful visage is Straight Jake, a personage so named in accord, probably, with the law of contraries which christens the tall person "Shorty" and the thin person "Fat." Certainly there is no one of the "good peoples" of the underworld who is more crooked or has less conscience.

The name which Straight Jake presented to Mr. Crowninshield, after a short preliminary exchange of truisms, was Samuel Farebrother.

Elisha was pleased to meet Mr. Farebrother. The gentlemen shook hands, and the latter explained that he was looking for a small farm.

"Why, I don't know," said Mr. Crowninshield slowly. "There's the Harvey place up the road a couple of miles. Nobody's living there just now, but it ain't run down any."

"Wouldn't you like to get in and drive down there with me?" asked Mr. Farebrother after a little. "Or are you too taken up for the time?"

"No-o, not exactly—just now, anyway," admitted Elisha almost reluctantly, something akin to a vague premonition creeping into his mind.

The other pressed his point instantly, noting the farmer's hesitation.

"I wish you could," Straight Jake coaxed in a wheedling voice. "I'm sure I'd appreciate it a pile and would make it right with you."

"No, no, it ain't that," Elisha hastened to assure the other; "only there is one or two little things that sort of needed looking after."

"'Twon't take more than half an hour," the persistent Mr. Farebrother pointed out, "and I'll drive you right back to your door. I wouldn't ask you, friend, but you might help me in reaching a decision, and if I should happen to buy, why, I'll see to it that you come in for your commission on the sale. And those little things you've got to do will wait till to-morrow, anyhow, wouldn't they?"

Elisha Crowninshield frowned slightly and pursed his lips for a slow whistle that

was more to gain time than anything. He didn't want to accompany the stranger, and still he hated to come out bluntly with a refusal. He was one of those men who do not always have the courage to say no squarely in the face of a pleasantly phrased invitation—who acquiesce rather than offend, even in direct contradiction to the dictates of their better judgment.

There was still in the mind of the man by the fence a vague something that insistently warned him, but after another weak protestation he climbed into the buggy beside Samuel Farebrother.

Even then he found his lips forming the excuse that he had ought to go and tell Sophy. He glanced over his shoulder almost yearningly, back toward the low, white house framed in an arch of maples at the end of the lane.

Straight Jake sniffed suspiciously and clucked to the horse.

"The old fool," was the thought that came into the sharper's mind. "He wants to ask the old woman if he can go."

Mr. Farebrother carried on the greater part of the conversation during the drive to the Harvey farm, while several times he turned his eyes in swift, searching review of the road to their rear. Once or twice he glimpsed a team poking along at a respectable distance behind them, which fact appeared to ease his mind greatly.

A surprisingly short survey of the farm in question satisfied Mr. Farebrother that it was exactly the kind of a place he has been looking for. There could be no doubt about it.

And Straight Jake beamed and rubbed the palms of his hands together. Things were getting on nicely. He made inquiry concerning the address of the owners—and to emphasize his good intentions exhibited a seemingly huge roll of bills.

Elisha fidgeted. Too, when opportunity offered, he studied Mr. Farebrother closely. *Something* about the man was vaguely familiar.

And yet even in these moments of uneasiness Elisha Crowninshield did not for a moment suspect—in his ignorance anent the many and nefarious ways of the confidence man—that the whole play was but a part of a carefully laid down plot to trap himself. Never in his life had Elisha heard of the treacherous web that men known as "cross-roaders" weave. The latter being merely another of the many resources of the bunco man—another angle to the age-worn gold-brick swindle.

For years Straight Jake had baited "gulls" and "pappy guys," speaking in the lingo of the bunco—all up and down the lanes of the world, in the rural districts, in the cities, on trains, at country fairs. "Plucking a pigeon," "three-card monte," "thimble-rigging," and a dozen more, some of hoary antiquity and others fresh from the brains of clever rogues.

Usually "John Bates" (the sucker) had to be coaxed to that point when he felt sure within himself of winning at an apparently legitimate little game; then he would proceed at once to his bank and draw enough cash to meet the requirements as set forth.

It was all a black art at which Straight Jake was very proficient, and he did not consider that Elisha Crowninshield was burdened over and above with intelligence. So far the road seemed clear for the work at hand.

Driving slowly on the return from the old Harvey farm, Mr. Crowninshield and Mr. Farebrother met a gentleman of solemn mien, who was jogging along in the opposite direction.

Pulling to one side of the road the newcomer drew rein and offered greetings of the day.

"Good afternoon, men!"

"Howdy!" acknowledged Mr. Farebrother, hunching his shoulders around as a partial screen between his companion and the gentleman in the other team, then closing one eye tightly as he turned his face toward the latter.

"Pokeamoke" Al, formerly of Sleepy Hollow (Trenton prison, New Jersey), received the wirelessed message from Straight Jake, and understood thereby that all was well.

In recent years Pokeamoke had turned to thimblerigging and other lines of bunco as something that was fully as profitable and considerably safer than reefing leath-

ers—a difficult method of picking pockets. It was Pokeamoke Al who had carefully shadowed Straight Jake, as a part of the play, since Jake had chosen the gull, and who now entered the scheme of things for a brief sojourn.

"And about how far might it be to the fair city of Mayberry?" Al wanted to know.

"It *might* be forty miles—but it ain't more 'n ten, I allow," stated Mr. Farebrother banteringly.

"Eight," corrected Mr. Crowninshield.

"Eight she is," said Mr. Newcomer, and added: "Live town or dead?"

"Live enough for honest folks," Straight Jake replied promptly, seizing the opportunity to carry the jest along. "I found it so during my stay there a short piece back."

Elisha remained silent. He wished, however, that Mr. Farebrother would drive along. But it seemed that such was not the intention of this gentleman; he was too intent on jollying the stranger.

"Pretty smart duck for an old man, seems to me," Al was saying.

"I don't calculate that I take backwater from any young whippersnapper," was Mr. Farebrother's comeback.

The other was silent for a moment; then he slowly wound the reins about the whipstock in its socket and began fumbling in the pockets of his vest. At length he said:

"Brother, I'll tell you just what I'll do." His voice was a bit contemptuous. He exhibited three small, cone-shaped objects. "Speaking of being smart. Here! Eyesight pretty good, eh? Well, sir, I'll give you ten dollars if you can tell me which shell I hide the pea under. 'Nothing to it,' says you. 'Try it.' says I.

Mr. Farebrother nudged Elisha and whispered from the corner of his mouth—a trick he had learned while visiting Charlie Adams (East Cambridge jail):

"Watch me take the crimp out of that young faker."

Pokeamoke Al produced a short board that was conveniently tucked away beneath the seat, and laid it across his knees. On it he arranged the three bits of thimble-shaped metal, under one of which he placed a small round object about the size of a pea.

"Now," said he, shuffling the inverted caps about slightly, "tell me where the little pea is and you win my ten dollars."

Mr. Farebrother laughed and slapped Mr. Crowninshield on the knee; then looked at Al across the short interval.

"See," coaxed the man with the thimble-rigger's outfit in his lap, "that's what I back my game with. Pick the shell with the little pea under it if you're such a smart old rube." He laid a ten-dollar bill on the board; then adopted the singsong of the professional ballyho, as Mr. Farebrother still seemed to hesitate.

"Little fun, sport, and amusement. Right this way, gents. Now you see it; now you don't. Where has the little pea gone? Ten you win; ten I lose. Name the shell and beat the game. The quickness of the hand deceives the eye. Name your choice and win the money."

Mr. Farebrother looked at Mr. Crowninshield and smiled. Then he said:

The middle one, friend."

And sure enough, beneath the middle shell the pea was hiding.

"Try it again!" barked the owner of the shells. "A second time you *can't* do it!"

But apparently Mr. Farebrother had nothing the matter with his eyes. A second and a third time and even a fourth he selected the shell that was hiding the pea. Each successive loss only made the stranger more insistent on another trial.

"Five times? No; you're out of luck!" he ranted. "A hundred dollars says so! Tell me—where has the little pea a home now?" Swiftly he shuffled the shells, then paused.

Mr. Farebrother won. The man beyond laid a one-hundred-dollar bill on top of the four tens, the while his eye wandered craftily to the face of the farmer.

"Wouldn't the other gentleman like to try it once?"

Elisha was a little bit confused. He couldn't for the life of him understand what this was all about. Still away down deep somewhere in the back of his head there smoldered that strange, vague something which he couldn't define.

"Here! See!" crowed the man known as Pokeamoke. He lifted a shell, disclosing beneath it the pea; then covered it again and shuffled the caps back and forth once or twice—and waited.

Samuel Farebrother interrupted at this juncture.

"Say!" he flared a little bit irritably, "what's the limit on this game of yours?"

"A thousand dollars!" cackled Al derisively. "That's me!"

"Huh!" said Mr. Farebrother.

Elisha whistled softly.

Straight Jake turned to his companion and lowered his voice.

"*I'm* going after that fool's money," he told Elisha. "What do you say—want to go half on that thousand? It's the easiest thing I ever saw, and there'll be two of us to watch the shells. We *can't* miss it. Of course, he'll want to see the color of our money; so if you want a little time to draw yours, or anything, why, we can tell him to come around to-morrow and we will meet him by appointment. By thunder, but I'm going to shut that fellow up if I have to take the whole thing myself."

In a blinding flash, and to the momentary rout of all caution, Elisha Crowninshield allowed the thought of going home to his tired-faced partner of life with *five hundred dollars* to outdistance all else. It would be something to bank—something to lighten their load and make the years ahead more secure against hardships.

Elisha sought to soothe his conscience in the next dazzling flood of exultation at the thought of what *might* be? It wasn't exactly gambling—was it? Sophy was powerfully set against things of that kind. No; it seemed to him as though it was more like winning a prize—like the time he had guessed the nearest to the correct number of beans in a jar, and won a brand-new harness, for twenty-five cents. Sophy had said that there wasn't anything wrong about that.

Pokeamoke Al and Straight Jake exchanged glances. The old yap was mulling it over hard. He wasn't different from all the other pappy guys—always willing to bite at moneyed bait. He would chew it over inside his thick head; then beat it for the bank—and to-morrow there would be a killing.

Both the Al personage and Mr. Farebrother came up gasping when Elisha Crowninshield said slowly:

"I won't have to go to the bank: I have the money with me."

There was a touch of pride, too, in the farmer's voice when he said it. He felt that it might be kind of an eye-opener to both of these men to know that, even if he was apparently a poor man of the soil, he carried so much money with him.

The confidence men regarded the other silently, the while he tugged from the secret security of that inner pocket the time-worn wallet and carefully thumbed the bills within its stained sides.

"Yes," said Mr. Crowninshield, "there's six hundred and fifty-five dollars. I—I guess I'll go in with you, Mr. Farebrother—on that."

Certainly it seemed that Samuel Farebrother was possessed of remarkable eyesight. Almost without an instant hesitation he selected the winning shell and calmly demanded of the stranger eleven hundred and forty dollars, which he received, although it completely absorbed the wealth which Pokeamoke Al had been flourishing.

The individual swore earnestly, making some few lurid remarks about being out of luck entirely. Otherwise he accepted defeat as a gentleman, gathered up the reins and departed in the direction of Mayberry. Not, however, until he had exchanged parting silent messages with Straight Jake.

In the mean time Elisha had returned to his wallet the original sheaf of bills. Mr. Farebrother had applied to his own roll the money which he had received from the hands of the thimblerigger.

For a winner Elisha was strangely silent; Mr. Farebrother, as usual, carried on the greater part of the conversation during the return toward the Crowninshield farm.

The buildings of the latter appeared just around the bend in the road. Smoke was coming from the chimney of the story-and-a-half white farmhouse. Sophy was getting ready to start supper. Elisha felt a strange sort of pressure crowding outward

against his chest; his hands were trembling a little. One moment he was warm, exultant; the next cold, perplexed.

It was where the main road crosses the plank bridge, just this side of the lane which leads to the Crowninshield house beneath a double row of maples, that Mr. Farebrother brought the team to a standstill.

"Do you know," he said, "I've been thinking. I don't quite like the idea of carrying this money down to the hotel in the village with me. That chap might take it into his head to turn around and follow me." There was an instant's pause; then Mr. Farebrother asked suddenly: "Would it be asking too much of you to keep this money of mine till I can get out in the morning and complete the final arrangements about that place you were good enough to show me?"

"Why—er—I don't think so," replied the farmer slowly, "not if you feel that it would be safer with me. I reckon I could take care of it—if it come to that. I never did steal anything myself, and except—once—I have always managed to take pretty fair care of what was my own."

Deep within himself Straight Jake, alias Samuel Farebrother, indulged in a smile of sneering contempt. What he thought was:

"You old idiot! What an awakening you've got coming to you!" But what he said was: "Do you know, neighbor, you have it written in your face—honesty and the ability to take care of what belongs, or has been entrusted, to you. A New Englander of the old order, and I knew it the minute I saw you."

From somewhere beneath the lap robe Mr. Farebrother produced a small, black tin box, such as is frequently used to place money and valuable papers in.

"What I was going to suggest," said the cross-roader, eying the farmer craftily, "is that we both lock our money in this box, you take charge of it, and in the morning we will split on that little game up the road; I will go and make a payment on that place you and I were looking over, and everything will be fine."

Mr. Crowninshield seemed just a little bit reluctant. Straight Jake noticed it instantly.

"Or if you had rather," he hastened to suggest, "I can count out the five hundred you won right now. You can put it in your wallet with the rest of your money. I know just how you feel; five hundred dollars isn't handed to us every day, so when it does come we like to kind of get the touch of it in our fingers."

"Yes," admitted Elisha, "I—I kind of wanted the money to show to Sophy. It 'd be a powerful surprise to her. We've pinched a good while to get that six hundred together. I was going to clear up a mortgage with it to-morrow, and then we was going to begin all over again to get a little more together to keep us when we were getting on."

He went on in a moment. "But this has been a sort of godsend. We won't have to scrape now quite like we did before."

"One more guess you've got coming to you, rube," said Straight Jake to himself. And aloud: "Sure enough, friend! Sure enough! Here's the happy medium. Count it yourself. Old-timer, you lay it on top of that little pile in your wallet—then put it in this box with mine, and we'll lock it up together. Here! Take the key."

Mr. Crowninshield accepted the small bundle of bills which the other tendered, and began to flatten them into the worn bill-fold. In so doing the old wallet slipped to the ground. Muttering because of his carelessness, the farmer climbed down over the wagon wheel and began gathering the money that had gone astray. When he arose the wallet was closed and clasped by the worn strap that circled it. It was bulky, and from its bulging sides several hastily arranged notes peeped forth.

Mr. Farebrother glimpsed the latter and smiled inwardly. Mr. Crowninshield reached over the wheel and placed the wallet in the box which the other was holding.

In the fleeting interval which followed, and before a certain black box was placed in the hands of Elisha Crowninshield, there transpired a bit of juggling that is as old as the hills themselves and which is known in certain lanes as the "shuffle trick."

The black box which Samuel Farebrother handed to Elisha Crowninshield was filled chiefly with *blank and absolutely worthless paper.*

Beneath the robe and clutched between the knees of the bunco man was the box which contained the farmer's precious wallet.

There remained now only the getaway, which was after all a very simple matter. Before Elisha discovered that he had been duped he, Jake, would be well on his little journey to the land around the bend.

Swiftly the soliloquy flashed through the brain of the cross-roader. There was no farmer's telephone in this section, no means of cutting off his retreat. The little station over there at South Mayberry, the down train—and his face would be turned toward new fields, toward other country rubes awaiting Pokeamoke Al and Jacob a hundred miles or so away. Off with the old; on with the new.

Jake rubbed the palms of his hands together and beamed down at Elisha Crowninshield.

Came a movement, a charge so savage, so swift that there was no avoiding its enveloping arms. A strange he-animal who was very much unlike Elisha Crowninshield suddenly had seized the bridle of the horse that Straight Jake had been driving, with a grimed right hand, while with his left he shook a menacing fist at the gentleman of the bunco.

"Just one minute, you snake in the grass!" roared the farmer. "That's all! Hear me?"

Straight Jake stiffened. His eyes glinted fire. The fool had gone crazy—or *had* his suspicions been aroused? Well, if it came to that, there were nine points already in his favor, and he was perfectly willing to fight, if necessary, to back them up. Very much so.

"Ever since I first laid eyes on you I knew I'd seen your face somewhere before," the farmer was saying, his voice pitched to a young bellow. "I knew it, but I couldn't place it, you miserable skunk, until you sprung this here box gag. Years ago on the old Mayberry fair-grounds was where you and I met, Mr. Man!"

"Two hundred and fifty dollars!" Elisha rumbled on. "Two hundred and fifty hard-earned dollars; then you come along with your soft soap and your mealy-mouthed story of a little investment that would make us both rich. And I—I like a darned fool believed you, and we put our money together in a box just like the one you gave me now.

"When I got home it was filled with *blank paper!* Now, you low-down, bewhiskered old thief, what have you got to say to that? Answer me! What have you got to say? Is it blank paper you have worked off on me again? You *know* it is! The minute you mentioned putting our money together in a box it all come back to me. It wasn't till then that I could place you."

In that instant Straight Jake snatched the whip from its socket, grabbed for the reins on the dashboard, and savagely applied the lash. The horse reared and pawed out with his forefeet.

"Oh, no, you haven't got me, hayseed!" cackled Jake, with shrill derision.

The horse lunged forward in frantic terror of that descending whip. With surprising agility Elisha released his hold, and in a violent cloud of dust the cross-roader was whirling away down the country road.

Once more the farmer turned his face toward that fading, dust-dimmed team that was disappearing around a bend—then, Elisha kicked away the dirt from a bit of a mound in a wheel-rut.

Came to view a crumpled wad of bills. Peeping from the yellow dirt of the roadway was Elisha's six hundred dollars, plus very nearly all of the joint capital of Straight Jake and Pokeamoke Al.

In that interval when Elisha Crowninshield had climbed down to recover the money which—apparently—he had so carelessly let fall, he had, crouched there behind the screen afforded by the buggy, swiftly covered the larger sum with loose earth; then padded his old wallet with fifty-five dollars in small bills—with which sum Straight Jake at this moment was exultantly hastening toward a prearranged meeting-point to split the jack with Pokeamoke Al, somewhere out yonder.

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

THE author of next week's new serial has taken the following quotation for his text:

"They are generally engaged in robbing other birds which are fishing. Through an amazing velocity of flight they overtake any winged fisher, force it by a swift and terrible attack to drop its prey, and then fall like lightning through the air, catching the fish before it strikes the waves below. Before gales, the frigate-birds are said often to fly low, and their appearance near or over land is supposed to portend a hurricane."

We think it would be superfluous for us to add any further word of comment on this story—

THE FRIGATE BIRD

BY LEE BOLT

other than to say that, while the author is new to the pages of this magazine, his work will at once excite your pleasure and your admiration. Lee Bolt is sure to win the recognition which so delightful a writer and so clever a story-teller deservedly merits. The first instalment must convince you how admirably and unselfishly we serve you. We spare no pains to secure the best the literary market affords. One dip into this story and you will be convinced we have not put too high an estimate on Lee Bolt's work.

READERS of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY are so familiar with the work of the author of our novelette for next week that any comment or recommendation on our part would be carrying coals to Newcastle, indeed, especially as it is a Chinese story—another of these amazingly faithful pictures of Pell Street life of which "A Simple Act of Piety," and "Himself to Himself Enough," are shining examples. In the present story

ALMOST A CHRISTIAN

BY ACHMED ABDULLAH

Author of "A Buccaneer in Spats," "Bucking the Tiger," "The Master of the Hour," etc.

the author has given us one more proof that as a teller of tales, and especially as a delineator of Oriental life and character, he occupies a place apart.

"TEACH: PIRATE DE LUXE" again appears in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY—the second story of C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne's admirable series of sea yarns. "THE COCHINEAL GROWER" is the title of this week's adventure. Captain Teach will be aboard each issue of the magazine during the summer months. Better get acquainted with him right at the start!

THERE is a double inducement for you to read "CORN TASSEL A LA UNION SQUARE," by Robert J. Horton in next week's magazine. The title of this charming little heart-history is enough to inveigle anybody, and the name of Robert Horton always means kindly humor and gracious humanity. This tale lives up to its promises. If you like wholesome sentiment, playful humor, and a good story, here are all three waiting for you to get your teeth into them.

You will find "THE BEST HE COULD DO," by Charles Wesley Sanders, an exciting story which takes you back to the days when steamboats on the Great Lakes were in the first flush of their ascendency. Sanders knows his history, he has a

wonderfully sympathetic understanding of men, and he has the story sense. This little tale proves all three counts. Don't overlook it in next week's magazine.

A LADY WHO LIKES DETECTIVE STORIES

To the Editor:

Enclosed you will find a money order for one dollar for a three-month subscription to the All-Story Weekly. Please renew it from where it expires.

Have been reading your most wonderful magazines for quite a while and I must say there is none that can beat the All-Story Weekly for good, mysterious, detective stories. Detective tales are my meat. The deeper and more mysterious the better I like them. You have some corking short stories, too.

The novelettes are splendid also. "The Left Hind Foot," by E. K. Means was a perfect side-splitter. Give us some more like those; the "Nan Russell" stories are fine. I enjoy them very much. Jeremy Lane's "Oblivion" is promising to be good. "The Red Seal," "Gray Dusk," "Ashes to Ashes," "Comrades of Peril," "The Owl Taxi" and others too numerous to mention but all good.

These are the ones I liked most of all. "Trailin'," by Max Brand, was a good Western story. All of your Western stories are fine. I liked them because Montana, where I live, is a rather wild and wooly State itself. I saw in a letter that was printed in the All-Story Weekly, written by Marie Leonard, of Brooklyn, that she was disappointed in Montana. Well, Montana is civilized, like the other States. But, dear me, for my personal taste, I would rather live some place else. Wish we were back in Oklahoma. That's the place for me. Not like Rockies, no siree! Well, I must close, trusting I will soon receive the next issue of the All-Story Weekly. Here's hoping the Munsey Co. weathers Easter just fine. The best of luck to all.

Red Lodge, Montana. E. K. A.

"A FINE, CLEAN-CUT STORY"

To the Editor:

Accept my sincere appreciation of your good magazine. I find in it splendid stories that inspire a reader to live a better and more useful life, and that make one feel the true value of manhood and womanhood which lies beneath what we are apt to term "common clay." These stories give us a deeper insight into human character and teach us to love humanity for humanity's sake. To my mind this is the greatest work an editor or author can do for his country—write the love of all mankind in the hearts of his countrymen.

I wish to speak especially of one story I have recently read—there are many others but I will take your time for commenting only upon this one. "Th' Ramblin Kid," by Earl Wayland Bowman is one of the finest and cleanest-cut stories I have read for some time. Of course, it is a Western story, and we who are of the West can appreciate it perhaps more keenly than those who have never had the pleasure and privilege of living in the West. This story not only graphically describes the real Western life as it is lived to-day on the big Texas ranches, but it also fills one with a sense of the sacredness of all life, and when the story is finished leaves one with that delightful feeling expressed by Mrs. Thomas Carlyle, when she had completed one of George Eliot's stories—"I am in love with the whole human race."

In looking through the Heart to Heart Talks I note that one of your subscribers expresses himself as not crediting Mr. Bowman's delineation of Western characters as being true. This gentleman has evidently seen cowboys on dress parade at some rodeo, or when like *Skinney Rawlins* they were wearing "white shirts" and making love to *Carolyn Jones*. Any one who has seen these big boys on the open range wrangling wild steers through the dust and brush, has never seen them "dressed in velveteens, or corduroys, with the cavalry puttee." Such a sight would be amusing to say the least. The author of "Th' Ramblin' Kid" must have lived with these men or spent some time in real action on the range to have been able to draw such characters true to life.

May we hope for further stories from the pen of this truly Western author? Assuring you of my continued interest in your good magazine, I am, Truly yours,

Portland, Oregon. S. L. Hoover.

THE MORE "DIFFERENT" STORIES, THE BETTER

To the Editor:

I have been reading the All-Story Weekly for several months and I have come to like it so well that I do not feel at home without it. I enjoy looking over the Heart to Heart Talks and the difference of opinion as to the value of the "different" stories is very interesting. As several others have expressed themselves upon this subject, I would like to give an expression to my opinion.

I thoroughly approve of the stand the All-Story Weekly takes in regard to the "different" story. I cannot agree with those who oppose them and I fail to see upon what grounds they can base their opposition. To a greater or lesser degree the spark of romance exists in all of us, but as it is given to very few to have the cloak of romance fall upon them, the best the rest of us can do it to satisfy that longing through the medium of a good story.

The opposition may try to conceal it, but the realm of the psychic, that vast land of mystery behind the veil, has an irresistible attraction for us all. Who can stand under the moonlit heavens agleam with millions of distant worlds and say

that our tiny earth is the only one that can boast of living beings? Who has the right to say that the admirable creations of E. R. Burroughs are false? Merely because we do not perceive them is no proof of their non-existence. Two hundred years ago people would have been burned at the stake if they had dared to suggest that there could never be such things as the telephone, the steamboat and the wireless. The wonders that science has accomplished in the past will be nothing to the achievements of the future.

So I say the more "different" stories we have the better; ordinary life as we know it is too humdrum. I thoroughly enjoy sitting down to read a story that is so full of power that the reader forgets himself and merges his being into that of the character.

Another thing that I approve of and I am sure that the ultrarealists will agree with me in this, is the absence of all slush, sentimentalism, divorce problems and the like, from the pages of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. From cover to cover it is a clean, wholesome magazine that a man may be proud to have in his possession nor need he be ashamed to be seen with it anywhere.

Sincerely yours,

Washington, D. C. HERBERT HOWELL.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

Enclosed find one post office order for three months' subscription to your splendid magazine. The stories are all good. Some are better and some are of the very best. Every week I look in the Heart to Heart Talks for sequels to "The Untamed" and "The Texan." I hate to think of the *Texan* and *Dan* going through life all by themselves. "The Ten-Foot Chain" wasn't half as wonderful as I thought it would be. Would like to see some more stories by E. W. Bowman; his "Ramblin' Kid" was fine. So was "Eastward Ho!" Please start my subscription with March 27th issue. I couldn't get it here. I have taken the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three years and I don't want to miss a copy. Yours for success.

Florence, Kansas, Marion Co. IRA SMITH.

Have been reading your magazine for quite a while and think it the best I ever read. I like all the stories, especially E. K. Means's negro stories. What has become of *Semi-Dual?* Some one please call at the roof garden and see if he is not at home. And our new writer, Earl Wayland Bowman—please have him finish "Th' Ramblin' Kid." Don't leave *Carolyn June* to lonesomeness very long. When are we to have that sequel to "The Texan"? I hope it won't be long. I love Western stories because I am of the West. I also would like to hear some more "Fenwick" stories. I thought them great. I do not care for the "different" stories but do not grudge them to those who do like them. I am well satisfied with the splendid stories we do get. Others I liked were, "The Gold Girl," "The Riders of Ramapo Pass," "A Man Named Jones," "Trailin'," "No Fear" and, last but not least, "Eastward Ho!" Here's wishing the ALL-STORY WEEKLY the best of luck.

Tecula, Texas. CLYDE WATHINGTON.

Please don't think for a minute I have forsaken the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, but as you can see, we have changed our address and we got so far behind in our reading, that we are reading the back numbers; but soon we will be your regular subscribers once more. "Th' Ramblin' Kid" was certainly a fine story, wonder if he was cousin to *Whistling Dan*. With the best wishes for the best book in the land.

Fountain, Colorado. MRS. BRUCE CHILD.