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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

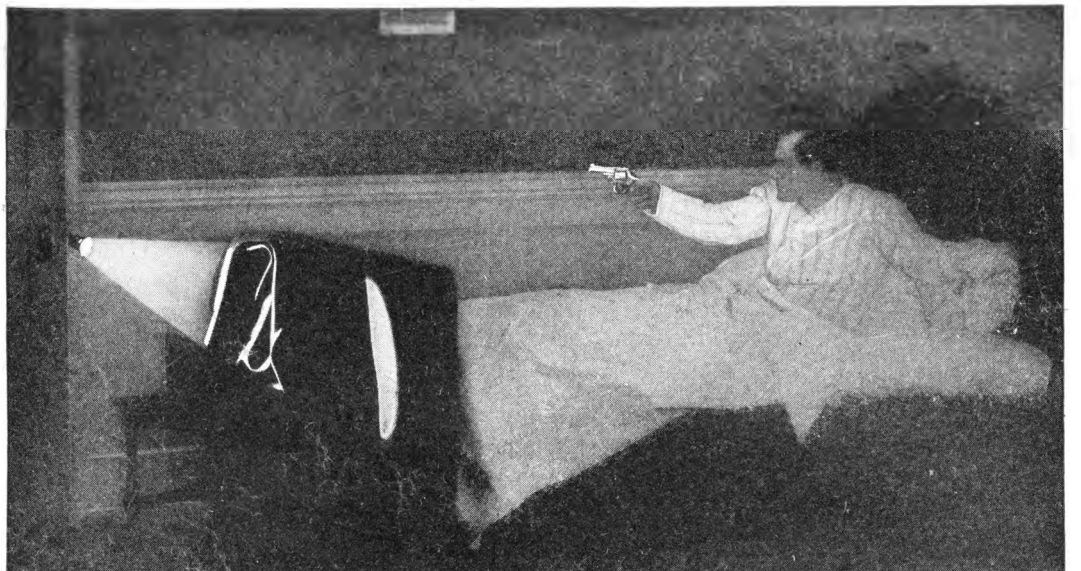
A Buccaneer in Spats

by Achmed Abdullah *Author of*
"The Blue-Eyed Manchu," "Bucking the Tiger," *etc.*

The Rotter Who Had All the Sand in the World

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

NOVEMBER 29, 1919



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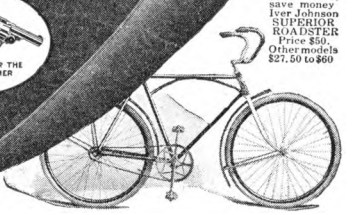

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME CIV — NUMBER 2

CONTENTS FOR NOVEMBER 29, 1919

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

SIX 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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Classified Advertising continued on page 2, back section.

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Do you know how commerce has opened new routes of communication, built great new railroads in Alaska, Australia, Africa, Asia, South America?

Do you know how many new industrial cities have sprung up as a result of shipbuilding in the United States?

Do you know where the new kingdom of Hedjaz and the new empire of Mongolia are located?

Do you know the new Europe that has come out of the war—with all the changes in boundaries, the new nations that have been born, the internationalized cities, the territories that are under plebiscites?

Do you know how the Peace Treaties have affected Africa, Asia, the islands of the Pacific?

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THERE is a new strap on Italy's boot as a result of the war. The northern boundary has been extended to strenghten the natural frontier—important readjustments have been made on the Dalmatian coast. Yet your present atlas does not show these vital changes. And this is only one example of the many vast alterations that have completely changed the map of every part of the world. You might better have no atlas at all than one that is full of misinformation. But this is the last time you need ever discard an out-of-date atlas, for now a *new kind* of atlas is ready for you—The NEW WORLD Loose-Leaf ATLAS—up-to-date *now* and *always*.

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY
VOL. CIV NUMBER 2
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 1919

A Buccaneer in Spats

by Achmed Abdullah

Author of "The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms," "Bucking the Tiger," "The Master of the Hour," etc., etc.

THE announcement of a story by Achmed Abdullah is no longer a mere incident of a magazine's publication; it has assumed the importance of an event. As all who read his first stories which went to make up the three series published in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY under the general title, "The God of the Invincible Strong Arms," prophesied he would do, Captain Abdullah has very decidedly *arrived*. An Oriental himself by birth and early training, with an Occidental education and many years' experience in both Europe and America, no one could be more thoroughly equipped for the difficult task of translating the reactions resultant from a meeting of the antithetical psychologies and philosophies of the West and the East. The present story begins in New York, but the scene soon shifts to the Far East, and there is worked out in the vivid, cleancut, tensely interesting manner that has in a few years' time made this author one of the masters of the story-telling art.

CHAPTER I.

"THE ROTTER."

"HE'S rather a rotter, isn't he?"

"Who?"

"Oh—what's his name—? Hudson. Langley Hudson, you know."

"Don't forget the DeWitt, Violet, dear. Langley *DeWitt* Hudson. That middle name makes a tremendous lot of difference—between Yonkers and the Battery."

"Sort of republican patent of nobility, what? Sort of thing that makes up for the rotter part—at least socially?"

The voice, trailing off into a chillily supercilious laugh, came from behind the screen of feathery, potted palms that, for the occasion of the great ball, had been drawn straight across Mrs. Cornelius Van Kraaft's conservatory. Crisply English it was, as crisply, arrogantly youthful; and Langley DeWitt Hudson, hearing his name, stepped smartly on the dancing pumps of the man who sprawled by his side to warn him to keep quiet, and listened with a shamelessly expectant amusement that was not in the least cynical.

"I know chaps like him at home," the

first voice went on. "We usually ship them to the colonies—in the same cargo with printed Manchester cottons and Scotch whisky, I fancy."

"Not quite as useful as the printed cottons, are they?"

"Nor as strong as the whisky, my dear Mrs. Van Kraaft."

"But," rejoined the latter, who had arrived at that mellow period in life where one frankly covers other people's moral shortcomings with the generous mantle of one's personal laxity, "at all events he is charming. He knows all about golden mocha spoons and polo ponies and the latest things in batik, and where to get one's pearls healed. I positively dote on him."

"Charm isn't an asset," said intolerant Youth.

"Isn't it? I am not sure. Anyway, don't you mind, my dear. You are never going to be Mrs. Hudson. With your money and your beauty—I *should* have put your beauty first—you are bound to marry some noble British duke with strawberry leaves and seventeen mortgages and the gout, who considers his Norman beak of a nose a racial and historical talisman."

"Oh—I s'pose so!"—languidly.

And the two speakers rose and walked away toward the scarlet-and-gold ballroom whence a lascivious Argentin tango brushed out with tinkly violin pizzicatos, the 'cello's honey-smooth undertones and the slapstick stammerings of bassoon and clarinet.

The other man gave vent to long-suppressed laughter, while Langley Hudson inserted a hand between the palm-screen and looked at the two receding figures: his hostess, Mrs. Cornelius Van Kraaft, built—"quite in keeping with her name and ancestry," he put it to his friend—on the generous, broad-beamed lines of a Dutch frigate and dressed in orthodox lavender taffeta and rose-point lace with pearls looped through her silvery hair; the girl by her side a picture to delight a Spanish painter, with her silken, raven-black hair folding like wings over tiny ears, her olive complexion, her profile—visible now as she bent from her regal height to the older woman—clear as a cameo, her supple, young figure in a low-cut, creamy gown of slender, Grecian lines, and with a loosely draped girdle that was woven in a confused pattern of peacock blues, greens, and strange pottery reds. The jewels she wore—moonstones and great Poonah diamonds in platinum settings—were just a trifle extravagant, just a trifle out of keeping.

"Stunning girl, isn't she?" He turned to his friend, James Shuttleworth, a short, dapper, fair-haired man, rather too carefully groomed.

"You mean—" Shuttleworth was still choking with mirth.

"Exactly." Langley Hudson was bland and passionless. "The girl who called me a rotter. Miss Violet Frayne."

"*Lady* Violet Frayne, you mean, old man. Mustn't ruffle the house of peers. Her father is the Earl of Knuteswold."

"Heavens—what an Anglo-Saxon mouthful!"

Langley Hudson yawned, lit a thin, black cigar, and stared at his remarkably perfect, bench-made shoes.

He was not a bad looking man, rather short than tall, stocky and strongly built but graceful, and with a complete, unself-conscious ease in every gesture and movement which was almost Latin; withal intensely, tersely masculine, his round head covered thickly with close, brown curls, his large nose strongly marked at the roots, his chin slightly prognathic. There was something in the expression of his brown eyes suggesting a reckless, devil-may-care sort of idealism, but scotched by the downward curve to the mouth that seemed the result of over-sophistication.

"Recent title—Knuteswold—isn't it?" he asked.

The other was distinctly flattered at being thus questioned by a man who was supposed to know the mysteries of the "Almanac de Gotha," "Burke's Peerage," and the New York "Blue Book," as a Presbyterian knows the "Shorter Catechism."

"Very recent, indeed," he replied volubly. "The varnish isn't even dry yet. Last royal birthday honors. He gave a thundering check to Queen Mary's pet

charity, I believe. Too, he's a prominent figure—"

"In politics, I guess?"

"No. In business."

"Oh!" Hudson smiled. "The modern sort of nobleman—beer and pickles and shoes and pink elephants sold across the counter?"

"Not exactly. Rather spices and peacocks and gold. Metaphorically, that is. You see, he's what they used to call a nabob in the good old days of Dumas and Sir Walter Scott. A great Anglo-Indian merchant prince; in other words, who writes his five-figure check in rupees instead of dollars or pounds sterling."

"Seem to know a lot about him, Jimmy?"

"I ought to. My firm has dealings with him—we run our own line of fast cargo ships through the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal to India, you know. And right along from Gibraltar and Algiers, clear through to the Persian Gulf and Calcutta, you're bound to deal with the noble earl. Has his head office in Calcutta. Resides there, too. His spider's web is stretched wherever there are palms and parrots and tropical stenches and brown-skinned lascar sailors singing the chanteys of the outer seas."

"Quite epic, aren't you? Too much champagne, old dear?"

"No." Shuttleworth shook his head rather ruefully. "But I told you my firm has a good many dealings with the old earl—and he certainly knows how to squeeze a dollar. Don't you ever tell me these English don't know how to drive a bargain," he added.

"English—is he?"

"Of course."

"But—the girl—Lady Violet—"

"Looks a bit exotic. I know. You see there's talk of a drop of Hindu blood. Something fantastic—raja's daughter—harem—silken ladder hanging from a balcony—all the regular movie stuff. Don't know how much truth there is to it. At all events, you are right, Langley. She is a stunner, and no mistake. Too bad she doesn't seem to cotton to you."

"Too bad, indeed. You see"—he ashed his cigar with a great deal of quite unaffected deliberation—"I expect to marry her."

"You expect to—*what?*"

"Marry her."

"But—" Shuttleworth was speechless.

"You mean to ask why I should expect to?"

"Yes."

"Well—why shouldn't I? I have no objections to her dad's tainted money, if he does bilk your firm once in a while. I like her accent. I adore her hair. I admire her taste in frocks—all but her jewels. Never mind about the jewels, though. I'll make her go in for emeralds after she is Mrs. Hudson. Always did like emeralds—they're so hopeful and green."

"Yes, yes! But—hell's bells!—why should *she* want to marry *you?*"

"That's just where the proverbial rub comes in," granted Langley Hudson, rising and strolling in the direction of the music.

The Van Kraaft residence, on Fifth Avenue in the correct Sixties, was immense, but Mrs. Van Kraaft had invited all New York that was "smart" and a great deal of New York that was not smart at all, and so the pretentious sweep of rooms on the lower floor was comfortably filled, and the sophisticated angels on the frescoed Tiepolo ceiling of the huge, square entrance hall smiled on a motley company.

For the hostess was a great lady who, as she had expressed it once to a remonstrating nephew fresh from college with the snobbish milk of extremely exclusive Greek Letters not yet dry on his lips, could afford to entertain her own butler and her second up-stairs parlor maid at dinner, if she should happen to feel like it.

Loyal, if rather sardonically so, to her own class, she also welcomed everybody who had something new to say, or, at least, something old in a new manner, with the result that people came to her house, not for culinary reasons, because her chef knew exactly how to blend a filet of sea bass with seeded white grapes and to bone a youthful squab and truffle it afterward; nor for social reasons, because the Van Kraafts, to quote Langley Hudson, "*were*

the Van Kraafts—slightly musty, you know, and pleasantly arrogant and solid and eternal, like the Stars and Stripes and the Rockies and the G. O. P."; but simply to escape from the wearisome round of Gotham tittle-tattle.

Thus it was to-night.

There were men, old and young, radical and tory, Jew and Gentile, sporting and intellectual, socially arrived and socially aspiring—doers and dreamers and a leavening of well-bred drones. And the women after their kind: women who had done things, women who thought they had done things, women who had never done a thing, and, too, Junior League débutantes in flamboyant Theda Bara gowns, worldly-wise virgins of half a dozen seasons earlier cleverly in ingenuous white and primrose ribbons and Preraphaelite coiffures, and aggressive dowagers of mid-Victorian vintage who foiled their ormolu antecedents with the help of astonishingly tight skirts and unlikely hair.

"Typical of this dear old New York of ours, don't you think?" asked Langley Hudson of the pouchy, sharp-voiced corporation lawyer whom he had picked up on the threshold of the conservatory. "A mixture of platinum and pinchbeck, steel and whalebone, essence of rose and quintessence of subway, vulgarity cloaked by purity and purity cloaked by vulgarity, Yonkers Dives and Wall Street Lazarus, honest man and grafter, and—myself!"

"Well—and how do you yourself fit into this remarkable hotchpotch?" came the other's counter query, carefully forensic and slightly bilious.

"I don't know—yet. I am only twenty-nine, you see—haven't had enough time to turn round and take stock of myself. But, according to the latest reports from the front, I'm a rotter Pardon me, judge," he interrupted himself, "there's little Dorothy de Peyster beckoning to me."

And, in the next twenty minutes, going from room to room, exchanging familiar greetings with men whose erudite beards matched their erudite reputations, with bankers famed for their wine cellars and their financial culpability, with poets whose drably immaculate private lives gave the lie direct to their stanzas of purple passion, with women mundanely discreet and mundanely indiscreet, Langley Hudson talked to Miss Dorothy de Peyster, a deceptively appealing bit of femininity in wisteria-colored satin and copper lace; he bowed before the parrot beak and rustling black moire of old Mrs. Van Updegraff and replied softly; he whispered into the pretty ear of a newcomer from Nevada who was trying to achieve metropolitan fame with the help of a string of three-karat rose-pink diamonds; he listened deferentially to the rumbling basso profundo of a horsy lady of Knickerbocker ancestry and angularity; he took directions, writing them on his cuff, from a matron in baby-blue duvetyn that was quite out of keeping with her adipose; he parried a resolute grandmother's challenge with a subdued buzz of mild expostulations; and, in each case, he promised to attend to something which had to be done immediately.

He was finally rescued by his hostess, Mrs. Cornelius Van Kraaft, who looked at him and smiled knowingly. White-haired she was, and stout, and close to the biblical span of years, but she still drew people to her instinctively, and she had a great, slightly malicious, natural shrewdness, a wonderful suavity of manners, a knowledge of men's and women's vulnerable spots—which, after all, are always the most human spots.

"Been attending to your regular business, I see?" she asked.

"Business?" Langley Hudson echoed.

"Yes, my boy. Carrying a stray leg of anybody's donkey."

Langley Hudson sighed.

"Of course," he replied. "It is tough work being poor but honest—*and* social—*and* getting away with it. You are familiar with my—pardon the crude word—finances?"

"I am. I've known your father and mother and your grand-parents. I've known you since you were a little tot; since that day—I recollect it perfectly—when you bit your governess in the ear because she insisted on your wearing long curls and talking French in public."

"Very well. You know then, too, how my parents—what's the new expression?—oh, yes—carried on, how they made both ends meet?"

"I do. I am quite sure that your father once mortgaged his whiskers—gentlemen wore them in those days—to place a ten-to-one wager on a horse down at Sheepshead, and that your dear mother once helped herself to her Aunt Caroline's best Venetian lace curtains when her dressmaker refused further credit, and draped them around her — *and* was the most stunning little woman at the ball — at the Stuyvesants, I believe. Don't tell me that Joffre or Foch or any other Frenchman invented camouflage. Your darling parents did!"

"Exactly. And that's the sum-total of my inheritance. That and a college education and a taste in vintage champagne and pearls. How much money do you think I have?"

"Nothing."

"Correct to the fraction of a cent. And yet I live—and I live well, don't I?"

"So it seems."

"And you think that, having nothing, I don't pay for what I get?"

"Well—yes."

"That's just where you are wrong, dear lady. For I do pay for it—in full."

"How so?"

"By carrying a stray leg of anybody's donkey, as you put it yourself. Little Dorothy de Peyster, for instance, has written some perfectly wretched sort of play that the Piping Rock set over on Long Island performed for the benefit of the starving Eskimos, or Abyssinians, or Kamtchatkans—I forgot. And of course it was a success, and now she has the idea that she is Pinero and Barrie and Augustus Thomas rolled into one, and so she wants the play submitted for regular Broadway production. George Cohan! And who knows George Cohan? Who can get past his relays of secretaries? I! Result—George Cohan is going to take a squint at the title-page of Dot's play. Further result—"

"What?"

"I am going to spend four weeks next summer at the De Peysters' place in Maine. Four weeks' board and lodging, don't you see?"

"Well—"

"Same with the others," he went on with just the faintest trace of bitterness. "That Nevada lady with the diamond anchor chain—take her. Her toy-pom has the pip or the flu or the D. T.'s, or something, and I know all about who's fashionable and expensive among the hound surgeons. Result — to-morrow I play dry nurse to a flat-nosed, soulless, sniveling pup —and that's good for about half a dozen dinners, several lunches, and a couple of box seats at the Metropolitan."

He paused; then continued:

"I'm the best dressed man in New York. That's a fact, isn't it?"

"I suppose so."

"How do I pay for it?"

"You don't."

"Wrong again. I do. Not in cash. Of course not. Simply by telling the young bucks round the Ritz lounge and the club smoking-room that Nelson's my tailor and Kernahan my haberdasher and Thornton my florist, and so on. There you are, dear lady. I capitalize my name, my ancestry—the Langleys and the Hudsons, not to forget the DeWitts. I am having all those dead blighters work for me."

"But — why? You are young and healthy and intelligent. Why, in the world, don't you—"

"Go in for honest work and all that sort of rot?"

"Exactly."

He smiled.

"By ginger," he said, "that's quite an idea. At least it may have the charm of novelty. I'll try it, anyway."

"Promise you will?" insisted Mrs. Van Kraaft, sharply driving home her advantage.

"I do. Here's my hand on it."

Three minutes later, out in the street, in the bracing December air, he shook his head.

"I'm a darned fool!" he soliloquized. "I shouldn't have promised!"

And he entered an all-night drug-store and telephoned to Mrs. Van Kraaft.

"I say," he called across the wires, "I

have reconsidered. Please release me from my promise!"

"I will not!"

She was about to hang up the receiver, but he stopped her.

"Wait—one moment!"

"What is it, Langley?"

"Where does that English girl live—Lady Violet Frayne?"

"At the Aspinwall. Why do you ask?"

"I'm going to call on her."

"I wouldn't, if I were you. She doesn't like you."

"I know. But I want something from her."

"Langley! You aren't going to ask her for—"

"Money? Oh, no! I am going to ask her for a job! Good night!"

CHAPTER II.

"IN THE REGION OF UNBELIEVERS."

LADY VIOLET FRAYNE'S Hindu *ayah,* gliding like some wistful, exotic, nut-brown little sprite through the dancing sun-rays that fretted the palatial suite at the Aspinwall with orange high-lights and delicate, heliotrope shadows.

"*Mem-saheb,*" she said. "*Saheb* to see you."

And she salaamed deeply and presented to her mistress the visiting-card which, by intricate and efficiently up-to-date methods, had found its way up-stairs.

Lady Violet picked it up, looked at it, and tossed it in the waste-paper basket.

"Have the desk clerk tell the gentleman that I am not at—"

Then, very suddenly, giving way to curiosity, yet angry with herself at giving way, she scotched the social white lie.

"Wait, *masamdansena,*" she continued. "I am at home. Have the gentleman come up."

"Listen is obey, *mem-saheb!*"

Two minutes later Langley Hudson bowed himself across the threshold, fur-lined ulster over his left arm, immaculate in cutaway, white brocaded waistcoat, and cloth-topped patent-leathers, an extravagant, yellow orchid in his buttonhole.

"How do you do, Lady Violet?"

"How *do* you do, Mr."—a slight, hesitating drawl—"oh—Hudson?"

And a pause, which embarrassed her more than him, but which she, being of English training, braked almost immediately with that most efficacious social stop-gap known to Belgravia, the Mayfair, and Hyde Park Corner—with that terse, almost symbolic question:

"Tea, Mr. Hudson?"

He draped his fur coat over a convenient ottoman, deposited his silk hat on the floor, chose a comfortable chair, sat down, crossed his legs, and shook his head.

"No, thank you," he said. "I am not an Englishman. Tea has no mysterious, atavistic appeal for me. But—I missed my lunch. Therefore, if you do not mind, I would rather have a Scotch-and-soda in a tall glass and a roast-beef sandwich."

He turned to the Hindu *ayah* who was about to leave the room. "Rye bread," he went on, "and French mustard—and tell the waiter not to forget the dill-pickles."

Then to Lady Violet, smiling ingenuously:

"I adore dill-pickles, don't you? They are *so* indigestible!"

Lady Violet gasped. But she did not reply a word—for the simple reason that she did not know what to say.

Socially cosmopolitan, highly trained, emancipated to a degree, she had in the past known and met all sorts and conditions of people, had known how to handle one and all of them; from recent South African millionaires who made up for the indiscriminate dropping of *h*'s by the as indiscriminate dropping of diamonds, to sporting red-faced west country squires more familiar with fox and spinney and harrier than the latest evolutions in the usage of oyster forks; from salaaming, yet supercilious East Indian potentates, to self-conscious Horse Guard officers, just out of Eton, and trailing an imaginary cavalry sword even when in mufti; from whiskered cabinet ministers and lords of admiralty making love in a paternal manner, to dashing stock brokers making love as a matter of business because her father was a millionaire in pounds sterling.

One and all she had known how to handle, with that typically British manner of hers, a mixture of ironic suavity and well-bred rudeness. But the young New Yorker's artless, frank impudence left her aghast. Left her silent, too.

And so the *ayah* went to give the order to the waiter, while Langley Hudson helped himself to a cigarette from a tortoise shell box and commenced talking barometrically and climatically, all about the bracing New York air, and "Yes, we'll have a cold snap early in the year," and "To be sure there will be a shortage of coal," and "Isn't our New York sky positively Venetian," and "Wait a few weeks and the red ball will be up and there'll be bully skating in the Park; and it was only after the *ayah* had returned with the tray, after he had taken a liberal bite and draft, that he turned the conversation into a personal channel.

"Lady Violet," he said, without looking at her, diligently spearing with his fork a slippery, evasive sliver of dill-pickle, "remember last Saturday — at the Van Kraafts?"

"Yes?" she asked, trying to yawn and not succeeding.

"Well—I decided then that I'd marry you."

"You—wha-wha-what?"

For the first time since her nursery days, Lady Violet was stammering.

"Marry you," he repeated.

"What *do* you mean?"

"Why—the regular thing, of course. Wedding bells, and a narrow gold ring, and a shower bouquet of sweet peas and damask roses, and an ordained gentleman in a snowy bib and canonized sideburns, and a couple of pounds of rice, and old shoes, and what God hath joined together, and—"

She rose, indignant, a light like a slow flame eddying up in her splendid, dark eyes.

"Mr. Hudson!"

"Wait, wait!" he went on, quite unruffled. "It is all right. No bones broken —nor going to be broken. You see, I have changed my mind. I wouldn't marry you on a bet!"

"Oh—and why not?" came her strictly feminine question.

"Because I don't love you."

And again she found herself aghast and speechless, but finally she regained a semblance of poise, and said:

"And now, Mr. Hudson, s'pose you end this charming impromptu visit—unless—" pointing at the bill of fare which rested on the tray, beside the whisky tumbler, "you haven't had enough lunch and would like to top it off with a little dessert, something sweet—ice cream, perhaps—?"

Langley Hudson chuckled and threw up his hands.

"*Kamerad! Kamerad!*" he cried. "You scored a hit there! I suspected right along that you had a sense of humor."

"I have," she replied serenely, "and I have also a sense of the—ridiculous—"

"You scored again!" admitted the New Yorker, lighting another cigarette; and this time Lady Violet could not restrain the laughter that, in spite of herself, came bubbling to her lips.

She was serious and composed a moment later.

"Mr. Hudson," she said, "I admit that what New York says about you is true. You have a certain arrogant charm which is disarming."

"Thank you."

"You needn't. I meant it as a fact, not as a compliment."

"So much more reason why I should thank you. A fact statement is the finest compliment in the world, you know. Take yourself. Your hair, your eyes, your complexion, the keen curve of your chin, the soft curve of your lips. All perfectly exquisite, perfectly adorable. Not because I say so—but because they *are* adorable."

"I fancy it's my turn to thank you, Mr. Hudson?" drawled Lady Violet.

"Decidedly so."

"Very well. I thank you." She made a mock curtsy. "And now—s'pose you tell me the real reason for your call."

"All right. Here goes. I want a job."

"You want a—what?"

"Job. Crude Americanese for position."

"Why come to me, Mr. Hudson? Of course, I have heard a lot about you. I am familiar with all your qualifications. You're a hereditary Knickerbocker, aren't you? And you know all about everything a

woman in society wants to know—where to buy the latest in Chippendale, foulards and Kitten's Ear crêpe and Paulette chiffons and what stud to go to for a correct Cairn terrier or Jap spaniel, and where to get your hair permanently waved and your flesh reduced and your toe nails stained with henna, and all that. You are—" she leveled her shafts straight and cruelly, but he never winced— "a sort of combination—oh—social errand runner, and social clown in bells and motley, and social valet, and social ladies' maid, and social man-milliner. Am I not right, Mr. Hudson?"

"Absolutely correct!" came his even reply. "In fact you rather understated my case."

"Good. But, you see, I have a maid, and a masseuse, and a social secretary. I am afraid I can't find a suitable opening for you just now."

He smiled.

"I do so hate to disappoint you, Lady Violet," he replied. "But this time you don't score. I wasn't going to ask you to let me be your little tame cat. I want a job with the head of the house!"

"The—head of the house?"

"Right. I want a job with that recently ennobled peer of the realm, your father, the earl of Knuteswold—old Sir Do-'Em-Brown Ten-Per-Cent."

She flushed an angry rose, but controlled herself.

"You know my father?" she asked.

"Only by reputation—and, oh boy, what reputation! I've been asking my down-town friends about him ever since the night of the Van Kraafts' ball, and they certainly whispered me some little earful. It appears that the old boy has considerable talent in the money-making line and that he appreciates a bargain when he sees it. So I want him to have his chance."

"What chance?"

"Chance at me, at my own, home-grown talents, before somebody else picks me up in the open market. But they say he's a hard man to meet. Thus—" and he waved a negligent hand in the direction of the writing desk—"won't you dash down a few lines and introduce me to him?"

"Why should I?'

"*Esprit de corps*—isn't that what the French call it.

"In other words, there's honor amongst thieves, isn't there? If Red Ike sees his chance of climbing the Sing Sing wall, he's sure to give his cell mate Bad Bill a leg-up, don't you think? If one Eskimo should meet another Eskimo somewhere in the tropics, he'll surely direct him to the lunch counter where they sell jellied whale blubber and braised polar bear steak a la Commodore Peary, and the most unregenerate South Carolina reb would warn the ghost of Johnny Brown's body himself against that camoufaked infamy they call coffee in London. Yes. There is honor amongst thieves. There is comradeship between people of the same race when they meet *in partibus infidelium*. There is the good old high-sign when brother Elk winks at brother Elk. And, by the same token, I'm now passing the buck to you, Lady Violet. It's your duty to help me."

"I don't see it."

"No?" He smiled. "You called me a rotter, that night at the Van Kraafts, didn't you?"

"I did!"—defiantly—"and I repeat it. You *are* a rotter!"

"True. And so are you! You are as big a rotter as I am—that's why it's up to you!"

And again he waved a casual hand in the direction of the writing-desk.

CHAPTER III.

GLIMPSES OF THE PAST.

IN that hectic jumble of inherited qualities which goes to make up the human soul, often the half forgotten, unexpected ancestral strain, the strain which seldom has the chance, nor perhaps the desire, to come to the surface, is really the most characteristic—in keeping, more or less, with the old adage that it is the exception which proves the rule.

It was so with Langley DeWitt Hudson.

There were of course, ready for the immediate usage of his every-day psychic ego, all the frothy, volatile, capricious traits he had inherited from his father and mother;

the facile charm, the graciousness, the wit, the well-bred effrontery, the laughing, fawn-like carelessness, the desire to sidestep grave issues with a negligent word or gesture, the preference for the scented path of roses—though somebody else paid for the roses.

But there were also other strains in his racial mosaic.

To mention just one or two:

There was a certain Dirk Van Streubenzee DeWitt who, in the early seventeenth century, had been a Dutch shipmaster out of Rotterdam, had fought his stout little, high-popped sloop, armed with only one swivel brass cannon, against a Spanish privateer that mounted sixteen pieces, had rammed and beaten her, and had wound up the day's entertainment by hanging the surviving dons from their own yardarm, smoking his pipe the while and giving thanks to his strictly Lutheran God.

Then there was one Sir Septimus Langley of Creston Hall in pleasant Sussex, a Jacobite cavalier who had toasted the King Over the Water and had died on the gallows in London, with a smile in his eyes and a curse on all round-heads curling his lips; and furthermore, a Hudson who had traded in the Far West, in the days when the southern shore of Lake Huron went by that name, and whom family legends reputed to have had the finest collection of personally taken red-skin scalps between Albany and Bowling Green.

From these men, too, Langley Hudson had inherited certain qualities, and one of them was a sudden directness that came close to the line of ruthlessness, of brutality. Before this, he had had occasion to show it; on the football field with a couple of gladiators embracing his legs, the pigskin oval in his hands, and the line five yards ahead; in campus rows; and in impromptu fights with barkeepers, taxicab drivers, and a Broadway restaurant's famed flying wedge of waiters.

Always it had popped out unexpectedly, at a word, a gesture, even merely a facial expression on the part of the other person, and it had been so this afternoon.

He had called on Lady Violet Frayne, partly in the spirit of a careless jest, on a quick, reckless impulse that was typical of his strength as well as of his weakness; partly really to ask her for an introduction to her father. For what he had heard about the Anglo-Indian merchant prince the night of the ball from his friend James Shuttleworth and—after his mad boast to Mrs. Van Kraaft that he would ask Lady Violet for a "job" from some of his down-town friends, former college chums, several of whom were engaged in the shipping and the Asiatic import and export business, had fascinated him and had stimulated his imagination.

The old earl, from all accounts, was a survival of that picturesque epoch when trading in the far lands was still a swaggering, clanking adventure, a spirited gamble with Fate, a high-hearted, two-fisted romance; when Malay raja or Gulf Arab shiek and European merchant met behind tightly closed rattan shutters, the velvet punka flopping lazily overhead, and dipped their direputable noses in the same cup of honeyed, spiced brandy, and winked at one another as Greek is said to wink at Greek, and played hide-and-seek with nosing, inquisitive British gunboats; when the men of the outer seas preferred a handful of Maria Teresa dollars and Chinese candareens and shoe-shaped, archaic Mandarin silver ingots to a draft on the Bank of England or a certified check, signed by the Rothschilds, the Morgans, or the Bischoffsheims; when yellow men and gold disputed the eternal Asian trade balance with white men and blood; when a nabob was still a swashbuckler upon the blue hills and the gray waters, and not a swag-bellied, asthmatic, dollar-coining automaton, safely ensconced behind a mahogany desk, a steel filing cabinet, and an army of immaculate, almost sacerdotal private secretaries.

There were sketchy, fantasmal tales of his life-long feud with another relic—a very much alive relic— of the swinging, motley trade days, one Sassoon ben Yakoub Sami, a Hindu Jew with a Scotch mother, who was said to have an unsavory, but profitable hold on certain Central Asian and North African native chiefs. Tales, too, of intrigues worthy of Catherine de Medici and the Duke de Talleyrand. Tales, finally, of a mysterious overland caravan route from

Pekin, through Outer Mongolia, Turkestan, Bokhara, Persia, Turkey, clear to Egypt and Tunis, to far Timbuctoo and into the sinister heart of Africa.

Tales egregious, exotic, grotesque, incredible!

Tales laughed at by the youthful, silk-hatted and silk-hosed export merchants of New York and London and Paris and Marseilles and Antwerp and Barcelona!

But, usually, these young gentlemen would not laugh for long.

For, their sense of humor overcoming their discretion, heedless of the warnings of others, sadder and wiser men, who had passed through the same mill, pitting their brains and energies and bank accounts against those of the Earl of Knuteswold, they would make the grievous discovery that the latter, romantic or not, a fossil or not, had one supremely modern characteristic; accomplishment, rather: namely, a serenely ruthless efficiency that was like a five-ply Nietzscheism brought on an up-to-date commercial basis.

Then the recorder of bankruptcies would add another name to his drab list, while the earl of Knuteswold would pass another check through the Calcutta clearing-house.

That much Langley Hudson had gathered from his down-town acquaintances.

And something else—from a casual talk with a casual friend, Captain Jeremiah W. Hicks, skipper and owner of the 12,000-ton cargo boat Marylin Martha Hicks, engaged mostly in the Far Eastern carrying trade, via Panama, Manila, and Shanghai.

"Langley," the captain had said to him, a little over an hour earlier, facing him near the gangplank of his ship that was about to warp out of her dock with a brave clanking and scraping of hawser and cable, "that old pirate of a Dick Frayne—though they call him the Earl of Hickamadoodle nowadays—has one sure-enough quality in his favor."

"Must have. Of course. Immense lot of gray matter in his tough old cranium."

"Yes. But I mean something else, something bigger, something far more valuable."

"Slip it across, Jerry."

"All right. You see, his nibs is one of those rare and crafty 'uns who have the ability to recognize and to use the *other* fellows' gray matter. Show him what you can do, and he'll come through with the spondoolix something tremendous. Take an interest in him?"

"Yes, Jerry."

"I guess because of that pretty daughter of his who's said to be visiting here in New York?"

"No. Other reason altogether."

"Tell me."

"Well—in a moment of incipient softening of the brain, I promised somebody I'd cut out the giddy butterfly and tango hound stuff, and do a little honest work for a change."

"And so you thought of asking the old pirate to give you a chance?"

"Well—just about that—though rather more—"

"More impulsive. Sure. I know you, young fellow."

Captain Jeremiah W. Hicks had been silent, had spat into the water, had studied his friend through half-closed eyes, and had then asked in a whisper:

"Mean it, young fellow?"

"You bet."

Another pause; then the captain's:

"Been asking some of your millionaire businessmen friends about him?"

"Yes."

"Did they by any chance tell you about the old pirate's arch enemy, that Hindu-Scotch-Jew mongrel, Sassoon ben Yakoub Sami?"

"A little. Sort of vague, though. They talked of him down at Joe Kirk's office—Kirk & Co., you know, wholesale merchants in East Indian goods."

"Did they know what they were talking about—say anything special?"

"No, come to think of it. They just poked fun and laughed. Said it was comical to picture those two tough old fighting-roosters carrying on their feud over three continents for nearly half a century, and—"

The captain had snorted impatiently:

"Well," he had cut in, "it isn't as funny as they think. I happen to know a lot about him, and you needn't ask me why I know nor how, because I sha'n't tell you."

"Shady past, Jerry?"

"Maybe. But—remember I told you his nibs is out for ability in the other fellow?"

"Yes."

"Well, now—listen. If anybody could—should—" and the captain had whispered close to the younger man's ear.

Langley Hudson had jumped back a step, shocked, incredulous.

"Jerry!" he had exclaimed. "I am after *honest* work, not after—"

"Not so loud. Sailors are gossips." He had interrupted himself and had sent a sailor, who was evidently listening, packing with a few sharp words, had again turned to the other, speaking in an undertone: "Maybe I am wrong. Maybe his nibs will draw the line at—. Well, I don't know. It is up to you. You are the doctor. Go and interview the old earl, if the spirit moves you; and if there's anything in you he can use, he'll find it quicker than a mosquito can locate a bald spot. And—s'pose you should need help, and s'pose I and she—" pointing at his ship—"should be within telegraph or wireless reach—well—I'll never forget how you and I met, how you helped me, a stranger whom you had never seen before—and—"

"You were one against a dozen. Forget it, Jerry."

"I sha'n't—ever. And remember, if you should need me—and if I should be within reach—"

"All right, old man, and thanks. Where are you off to?"

"Calcutta—via the Suez Canal. We'll warp out inside of five hours, I guess. If you want to ask me another question before the Marylin sails, you can 'phone me right to within three minutes of departure. Here's the number—get it via the dock superintendent, he'll switch you on—" and he had scribbled the telephone number on a piece of paper.

"Thanks again!"

It was then that Langley Hudson had decided to ask Lady Violet for an introduction to her father, had done it in his own erratic fashion, laughingly, good-humoredly, until something had unleashed in him the lawless strains of Dutch patroon and Jacobite cavalier and Indian fighter. Perhaps it had been the manner in which she raised her curved eyebrows, perhaps her chilly, remote aloofness, or just the rising inflection of her beautifully modulated voice.

At all events, he had come out with his brutal, direct:

"Yes. You're as big a rotter as I am, Lady Violet!"

But he was not prepared for her answer. He would have understood had she turned on him indignantly, had she asked him to leave the room.

Instead, she helped herself to a cigarette, inserted it into a long jade holder, lit it, blew out three perfect smoke rings, and inquired, not languidly but with real interest:

"How so, Mr. Hudson?"

CHAPTER IV.

"SAUCE FOR THE GANDER—."

THIS time, it was Langley Hudson's turn to be surprised.

"How—how—so?" he echoed, stammering rather sheepishly.

"Exactly. You make an accusation against me, and I ask you to substantiate it, to prove it, if you can. Fair and logical, isn't it?"

He smiled; then broke into laughter.

"By ginger," he exclaimed, "you are a sport, Lady Violet, aren't you? And—you mean—you really, truly want me to tell you?"

"I certainly do. I want to know why you call me a rotter."

"Yes—and a worse one than I am. All right. Here goes. You believe in emancipation, and votes for women, and the equality of the sexes, and all that sort of thing, don't you?"

"Decidedly so."

"All right. And you believe that equal rights mean equal duties?"

"Naturally."

"And that what is gravy for the he-duck is gravy for the she-duck?"

"Yes."

"And vice-versa?"

"Surely."

"Good. Now, to switch, it appears that I am a rotter because I refuse to measure

ribbons or break stones or ruin my lungs yelling out lies on Wall Street; because—"

"Because," she cut in, "you accept—oh—social charity, Mr. Hudson."

"Not a bit of it. I earn my living by my charm, my wit, my—"

"God give us a good conceit of ourselves!"

"Second the motion! But—please—play the game—don't interrupt me all the time. I repeat, you call me a rotter because I let my charm, my wit, my knowledge of all sorts of light, frivolous, worldly affairs, and my Knickerbocker ancestry, work for me. Is that it?"

"Just about. Although—"

"Although I put it in as flattering and as advantageous a light for myself as possible. Of course I do. That's only natural. And—now—what about you, Lady Violet?"

"Exactly. What about myself? I am so curious to know."

"Surely. Curiosity is woman's vice and man's virtue, because it humanizes the latter and dehumanizes the former. Well—what do *you* do for a living?"

"What do I do—?"

"For a living—just that!"

"Why—I—"

"You do just what I do. Only more of it and worse—or better, according to the viewpoint."

"I don't understand you, Mr. Hudson."

"Don't you. And I thought you were a smart girl—I thought you had gone to finishing school and all that—"

"And *I* thought you were polite to women!"

"And *I* thought you believed in equal rights for men and women—equal privileges!"

At which they both laughed.

"Well," he went on, "to return to our muttons, it appears that you do nothing for a living except what I do. I capitalize my charm and wit and manners which are *my* sex weapons, while you capitalize your bully figure and lovely face, which are *your* sex weapons."

"Mr. Hudson!"

"Equality, equality, please! Furthermore," he went on, "I capitalize my remote ancestors, the Langleys and Hudsons and DeWitts, while you capitalize your more direct progenitor, namely, your fond parent Sir Do-'Em-Brown Ten-Per-Cent. And, really, in that particular instance, I am more honest than you. For I give better value than you."

"How?"

"My ancestors were gentlemen for generations back, and so, when I, in my own person, introduce my sires to the people who care for that sort of drivel and are willing to pay for it, I give them at least the real thing—and not shoddy, pinchbeck stuff as you do!"

"As *I* do?"

"Just that. For, while your father is a peer of the realm and has doubtless the order of the garter and the sacred silk suspenders, it seems that he started his noble career somewhere in the slums of Liverpool or London. Let that pass, though. I repeat that you do just what I do. I live on my ancestors' names and fame and whatever mental gifts they may have bequeathed to me, while you use your father's title, while you spend his money, and rely on his social and business connections."

"I—" she was on the verge of giving way to indignation.

"Don't you?" he insisted.

"Yes," she admitted, weakly, but truthfully.

"Good enough. Therefore it appears that we are birds of a feather—though your plumage is of slightly brighter hue than mine. For, while I am a rotter only in New York, you are a rotter in all the capitals of Europe *and* in New York; in fact wherever you go, covered by the mantle of your father's bank account and coronation paraphernalia. That's the truth, and you can't deny it. Not if you believe in equal rights and equal duties."

"I do not deny it, Mr. Hudson. You have proved your point."

She rose, walked over to her traveling escritoire, and busied herself with pen and ink and coroneted writing paper.

"Your initials are L. DeW., aren't they?" she asked.

"Yes. Why?"

"Oh—I'm writing you that line of introduction to my father you asked me for."

Langley Hudson laughed.

"By ginger," he said, "rotter or not, you are a dear, the dearest dear in all New York. I do wish I could fall in love with you!"

"Why?"

"Because you'd make such a bully, such a perfectly mated wife, for a rotter like myself!"

CHAPTER V.

AU REVOIR.

"WHEN do you s'pose you will be ready to start for Calcutta?" asked Lady Violet, signing the letter and drawing out another sheet. "You see, I am rather fond of my father, and it'll be only fair to warn him that he's threatened by the arrival of a—oh—social buccaneer."

"Don't trouble," Langley Hudson replied. "I'll get there before your letter of warning. In fact, I start immediately."

"Immediately?"

"Yes. To-day. Within a few hours I'm going to make my farewell bow to the Statue of Liberty and the Manhattan shore line."

"But—"

Lady Violet slurred, stopped. She was a little embarrassed, and he interpreted the cause for it correctly.

"You mean—" he asked—"what about the ducats, the *nervus rerum?*"

"Well—yes. I thought you were—"

"I am! Broke!"

"Do you want me to—" Again she was embarrassed, and hated herself for it; though, in a way, she liked it—it was such a new sensation.

"No," he smiled. "I do not want you to write me a check."

She blushed. More and more her supreme ease of manner was leaving her.

"I—I am so sorry, Mr. Hudson. I really did not mean to—"

"To hurt my feelings? You can't hurt my feelings by offering to lend me money. You see, I would just as soon borrow money from you as from anybody, or everybody, else, the Grand Cham of Tartary, Billy Sunday, and Trotzky included. Why, my dear Lady Violet, I'd borrow from the Archangel Gabriel himself, flaming sword or no flaming sword, if I should run across him in the hereafter."

"Then—why won't you let me—help you?"

"Because I have certain sound, though erratic, economic principles. They have stood me in excellent stead in the past. I am going to keep you in reserve—for the day when I'll really need you. But I don't need your help to-day. I am going straight to Calcutta—"

"A ticket to Calcutta will cost you every bit of four hundred dollars. And you told me yourself that you were stony broke."

"I am—in money."

"Well?"

"But I have friends. Friends are my investment, my capital, my unearned increment, and at times—" He looked straight at her, and again she felt the blood rush to her cheeks, felt a disturbing wave of self-consciousness. "My speculative values. All I'll sponge off you to-day will be a telephone call, all of a dime's worth. May I?"

"Certainly you may", she replied, with deliberate, self-defensive stiffness. "The telephone is in the little hall—over there."

"Thank you."

And, a minute later, she heard scraps of conversation:

"Worth 23758? Dock superintendent? Hello—hello—can you switch me on to the Marylin Martha Hicks. Sure I'll wait—thanks awfully."

Then, after a few minutes:

"That you Jerry? Langley talking—Langley Hudson. When are you off to smell the forty-nine different bad smells of Calcutta? What? All right. That gives me over two hours. You see, I'm coming with you. Tickled—are you? So am I. See you anon."

"All cocked and primed," he said to Lady Violet, returning to the front room, and pocketing the letter of introduction to her father. "A thousand thanks—a thousand apologies—a thousand wishes, and—*au revoir!*"

"*Au revoir,* Mr. Hudson."

She gave him her long, narrow hand, and he held it in his for several seconds, studying it rather quizzically.

"Not exactly an English hand", he said finally.

"No?"

"No. You see, your thumb is too long, the half-moons on your nails are too sharply defined. There's breeding in your hand—and your father—"

"Don't be unnecessarily rude. My father came from the slums. You said so once, and it is true. But my mother—" she checked herself.

"Is the story true?" he asked in a low voice.

"What story?"

"Oh you know—about your mother being—"

"Quite true", she said, "if you insist on knowing it. My mother—she is dead—was the daughter of an Indian hill rajah, and my father ran away with her."

"Romantic, isn't it, Lady Violet?"

"Very. Too bad the days of romance are over."

"Are they?"

"Aren't they, Mr. Hudson?"

"Oh—I guess so. Well—*au revoir* once more!"

He went to the door, stopped there, turned, and seemed puzzled, undecided.

"Lady Violet", he began, "I am afraid that you will be surprised at what I am going to ask of you."

"I shan't either", she replied, with a return to her old, sublimely self-possessed, rather flippant manner. "After this afternoon I shall not be surprised at anything you may say or do."

"So much the better. Therefore—won't you see me off?"

"See you—off? Where? When? How? What?"

"Just that. I have a dozen things to attend to before the ship sails, and I will not have time to ask any of my friends to come. And I just hate to see the dock slide away with nobody to wave a hand at me and wish me *bon voyage* and good riddance. I am a sentimental sort, don't you see? Do come. Please!"

"But—"

"Do! It is going to be a frightfully lonely trip anyway."

"You'll meet all the world and all the world's mother-in-law aboard. One always makes friends on ship."

"But I am going on a cargo ship. There will be no passengers. The skipper is a pal of mine. Won't you come and wish me—oh—whatever you feel like wishing me?"

"Oh— well—" she smiled.

"He, or she, who hesitates, is lost," he continued quickly. "I shan't take no for an answer. Now—you sort of like me, don't you? Go ahead and be a sport and own up to it like a little man."

"All right. I plead guilty."

"Bully for you—for me, I meant to say. And so you will come down to the dock and take part in the obsequies. Gotham about to lose its one and only Langley DeWitt Hudson! Imagine it, will you, if you can? All right." He took out his fountain pen and wrote rapidly on a scrap of paper.

"Here you are. Just follow the directions. They'll take you straight over to Hoboken and to the Marylin Martha Hicks. You'll recognize it by the skipper's house flag—a green cabbage rampant on a field azure—and by the skipper's crimson, curly beard. You'll come, won't you?"

"Yes."

"Great!"

For a second he was silent; then went on:

"By the way, better take your maid along—that little bit of golden-skinned Hindu humanity who let me in."

"Why? Don't you think I am emancipated enough to do without a chaperon?"

"Oh, no. It isn't that. Personally I dislike chaperons. You are always supposed to flirt with them to keep them quiet. But Hoboken is rather a rough place late in the afternoon, what with sailors and stokers and things. Please take your maid along."

"Droll, how old-fashioned you ultra-moderns are," smiled Lady Violet. "But I'll do it."

"Fine and dandy!"

And he bowed over her hand, was out of the room, out of the house, up the avenue, where he stopped at a florist's, and greeted the dignified, elderly manager in a jovially familiar manner.

"Dick," he asked, "how is my credit today?"

The other curled his thin lips in a slightly melancholy smile.

"How like your dear, late father, Mr. Hudson," he said. "That is just the way he used to greet me."

"Like father, like son. Also, unto the third and fourth generations! But—how *is* my credit?"

"The same as ever," smiled the manager.

"I shall interpret that my own way if you do not mind. And now, let's have a look at your cut flowers."

"This way, Mr. Hudson. We have some splendid guelder roses—and gardenias."

"Bully! Gardenias—and white orchids, and white sweet peas, and white tulips—and something in a flaming yellow—"

"Has the lady dark hair?" asked the other.

"You guessed it."

During the next half hour, Langley Hudson had similar interviews with his haberdasher, his tobacconist, his boot maker, his book seller, and the places which he patronized for sweets and fruit and toilet articles; but even those among his friends who were most familiar with his erratic, comet-like nature, would have been surprised could they have seen where he spent the next fifteen minutes.

For it was in one of those little shops just off the Avenue where a woman, provided she has a five-figure bank account and knows the address—since this sort of place never advertises, is always on the second or third floor, and has only a modest, small brass shield next to the bell downstairs to announce its existence to the chosen, can buy anything that is *dernier cri* Parisian from sporting box coat and cape suit to a gown of hand embroidered sweater-weave poulette, from an auratone silk wrap that looks like moonbeams on running water to a diamond dusted hair net, from the latest underwear in the latest nuance of orchid to a boudoir cap of silver lace and mandarin blue, from a perversely simple blouse of velours de laine to an exotic hat of Yeddo straw, from a goura feather stole to a bottle of waterproof rouge.

The proprietress, a beetle browed, eagle faced, black haired woman, Madame Céleste, whose irreproachable broken English never for a moment betrayed the fact that she had started life as Bridget O'Callahan above a plumber's shop where Bleeker Street plays hide-and-seek with Varrick Street, greeted Langley Hudson like an old friend.

"*Eh bien, mon p'tit,*" she said, "I suppose Mrs. Sturtevant ask' you to speak to me about that gown for *mademoiselle* her daughter's debut—*hein?*"

"No. It's a more personal matter. Let's go into your private office."

There he talked to her rapidly and in a whisper, and she inclined her head.

"Yes, Mr. Hudson. I shall do it. Do not worry. It will be—*comment dire?*—absolut'—ah—correct—of taste exquisite and complete in every detail."

"And it must be there on time—great hurry, you know."

"I drop all other work! I rush! I fly! Write down the address—the directions, *mon p'tit.*"

He wrote on one of madame's engraved cards.

"Here you are!"

"*Bien!* No, no—do not thank me. You have done me kindness in the past—the great ladies you sent here—the recommendations—you gave—. All right! A kiss then! *Au revoir!*"

It was nearly a quarter to five when he reached his modest lodgings in the West Nineties. The hall was dark, and he was rather startled when a voice came out to him from the trooping shadows:

"That you, Langley?"

"Yes."

He opened the door to his room, and in the haggard, wintry rays that filtered through, he recognized his visitor, Adrian Van Kraaft, old Mrs. Cornelius Van Kraaft's nephew, a tall, heavy, well dressed man who looked like an elderly roué, handsome in a way, yet amorphous, washed over by the pitiless hand of time and vice, with a last, pathetic effort after dignity and repose. Langley Hudson knew him only slightly, had never liked him, had never

had much in common with him, and was surprised at the visit.

"Sure you want to see *me*?" he asked. "Or—" he pointed at the apartment across the hall.

"Not today," laughed Adrian Van Kraaft. "I know Minnie Duval lives there. Of course I do. I know the addresses of all the Gaiety chorus girls. But I am here to talk business—with you."

"Well—come on in."

Then, closing the door and switching on the electric light:

"I haven't much time though, old man. I am in a dooce of a hurry."

"Oh—I know." Van Kraaft chose one of his host's two rickety, gangrened chairs, lowered his bulk gingerly, and lit a long, black cigar. "You are off to Calcutta, aren't you—this afternoon?"

Langley Hudson blinked and gasped.

"How the devil do you know that?" he asked.

"Oh—a little bird told me!"

CHAPTER VI.

A COMMISSION.

"LET'S have the name of the clever little bird?" Langley Hudson suggested.

The other laughed—an obese, self-satisfied sort of laugh.

"I don't imagine it would be any use trying to lie to you?" came his counter query.

"That depends entirely on your skill in the art of—oh—terminological inexactitudes."

"Well—I might tell you that I heard the news from my esteemed aunt, Mrs. Cornelius Van Kraaft."

"Punk, amateurish fib, that! First of all, your aunt has no idea that I am going, and, secondly, you are not exactly popular with her."

"Perhaps Lady Violet told me."

"That may be true, but I doubt it."

"Why?"

"Because—" Hudson rejoined, bluntly, "Lady Violet seems to have both taste and discretion, and I can't quite picture her confiding in you."

"Thanks."

"Don't mention it. Go on."

"Oh—well—s'pose I tell you that—"

"That the moon is made of green cheese! Save your breath," Hudson cut in. "It doesn't make any difference after all how you found out, as long as you did find out. Not that I really tried to make a secret of it. You are quite right. I am leaving this afternoon for Calcutta."

"On the cargo steamer Marylin Martha Hicks. Jerry Hicks is the skipper."

"Move to the head of the class, Master Adrian Sherlock Holmes Van Kraaft. But—tell me—what has my going to India to do with you? I don't owe you any money, do I?"

"No. I am a careful man. But, speaking about money," said the other, drawing out a pocketbook and producing a thick roll of yellow-backs, "how would ten thousand dollars strike you?"

"They'd strike me right in the spot where they'll do the most good. What do you want me to do—mayhem, arson, barratry, or a little plain homicide?"

"I don't want you to do anything illegal."

"Oh?"

The two men looked at each other for several seconds, silent, rather tense.

Each was familiar with the other's reputation. Van Kraaft knew that Hudson was a well-bred social hanger-on, while the latter knew that there were vaguely disgraceful rumors associated with the former's name: the man had been blackballed in more than one conservative metropolitan club; too, once a junior partner in the famous old New York import and export firm of "Hendrik Van Kraaft's Son's Great-Grandsons," he had lost his partnership for reasons hushed up by the family and which it had taken a great deal of political pressure to keep the district attorney's office from investigating.

Thus there was a link between Langley Hudson and Adrian Van Kraaft—a link, not of friendship and esteem; rather of the knowledge of their mutual degradation.

Van Kraaft looked up, an inefficient, but brutal menace in his deep, blue eyes.

"Suppose I trust you," he asked, "what guarantee have I that you won't abuse my confidence?"

"Not a one in the world. I'm afraid

you'll have to trust me without—oh—collateral. You see, I am not making you any proposition. It's the other way about. Come through with what is on your mind, or leave me. I *am* in a hurry."

The other inclined his head.

"I guess you are right", he said.

"You bet I am. I may be a rotter, but I am an innocuous sort of rotter. There's nothing in my past career, lack of career rather, which you could use for a lever, by which you could force me to—"

"Do you mean to insinuate that I would try to blackmail you if I could?" came Van Kraaft's minatory question.

And then Langley Hudson's cool, even reply:

"That's just exactly what I mean. And you know yourself you would. You see, I once heard a spicy little tale about you and old Mahonri Pratt and—"

"Cut it out, damn you!"

"All right, all right. Keep your hair on, old man!"—and Hudson rose, and began packing a couple of suit cases with a practiced week-end hand, without paying any further attention to his visitor.

The latter was in a brown study. Several times he seemed on the point of leaving the room, thought better of it, sat down again, wrinkling his forehead, chewing his black cigar. Finally he arrived at a resolution.

"Langley!" he called.

"Oh—you still here?"

"Evidently." He paused, and continued: "You are right. I shall have to run the risk."

"What risk?" demanded Hudson, meticulously folding a pair of creamy duck trousers.

"That you'll play square. That you'll do what you'll promise to do. That you'll keep mum about the whole affair. I offer you ten thousand dollars, and all you have to do to earn it is to deliver this—" he drew a large, sealed envelope from his pocket—"to the man whose address is written on it. Will you do it?"

"Rather. I adore easy money. Let's have the envelope—*and* the ducats."

He held out his hand, but Van Kraaft smiled and shook his head.

"Have I your promise that you'll deliver the envelope to the addressee in person, and that you'll keep quiet about the affair?"

"Yes."

"All right. I shall deposit the money to your credit at the First National, or any other bank you choose, the moment the addressee cables me that he has received the envelope—intact—with the seals, and they are very intricate, very scientific seals, unbroken."

"Nothing doing," replied Hudson, smoothing down a collection of extravagant four-in-hands. "You may trust me, but I don't trust you across the street. You pay now, spot cash and no strings, or the bargain is off."

Again there was silence, and again Van Kraaft came to a sudden resolution.

"You have me", he admitted. "You hold the ace in the hole. Here you are—" and he handed over the money and the envelope without further argument.

Langley Hudson pocketed the first, and studied the second.

"Look here", he exclaimed, "you have made a slight mistake. I am going to Calcutta via Manila and the China ports, and this address says something-or-other street, Tunis—North Africa."

"I know. Jerry Hicks has changed his mind. The Marylin Martha Hicks is going through the Straits of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal. She'll stop at Tunis for coal and to unload some cargo."

"Oh—you know a whole lot, don't you?"

"So it appears;" and Adrian Van Kraaft picked up hat and coat and turned to the door.

"I say!" Hudson called after him. "Seems to me you're an extravagant cuss—money no object, no object at all. Ten thousand dollars where a five-cent postage stamp would have turned the trick, or, if you don't trust the post office, you might have given the envelope to some sailor or commercial traveler for a couple of hundred, or to—"

"Saint Peter himself! I have my reasons for picking you, and I have my reasons for paying you well. By the way—mind signing a little receipt?"

"Not at all. There—" pointing at his

writing desk—"you'll find paper and pen and ink."

And, a few minutes later, Langley Hudson signed the following:

In consideration of ten thousand dollars, receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, I promise to deliver, in person, into the hands of Sayyid Ali Abdelkader Jangi-Dost, in the Street of the Grain Merchants, in the City of Tunis, a sealed envelope given me this day by Mr. Adrian Van Kraaft. I promise, furthermore, that I shall deliver this envelope within twenty-four hours of the arrival of the steamship Marylin Martha Hicks, at Tunis, and that I shall keep quiet about the whole affair.

New York City, December — 19—.

"A little informal, but it'll do," said Adrian Van Kraaft, pocketing the receipt.

"By the way", asked Langley Hudson, as the other was about to step across the threshold, "how do you know that I shall play square?"

"Oh—you are just the sort of a fool who would."

"Charming of you to say so!"

And Adrian Van Kraaft closed the door behind him, while Langley Hudson finished packing.

CHAPTER VII.

"BON VOYAGE"

LANGLEY HUDSON looked at his watch. The Marylin Martha Hicks was due to sail in a little over an hour. Thirty minutes would take him to Hoboken and on to the dock; he needed another thirty minutes to make certain elaborate preparations aboard ship before he could welcome Lady Violet Frayne; and so he had not much time to spare.

He walked over to the telephone.

"Mike", he called to the janitor, "come up here right away, will you?"

And then Mike Donovan made his appearance shortly afterwards, he handed that astonished individual five hundred dollars.

"Mike," he said, "we've been pals you and I, haven't we, since I moved in here?"

"Faith an' we have, Mr. Hudson."

"You have stood between me and the landlord, often and nobly."

Donovan smiled, reminiscently. He looked at the suit cases.

"Are ye goin' to leave us, Mr. Hudson?" he asked.

"I am—for a while. That's why I am giving you this money. Pay my rent for the next six months. Pay whatever small bills I owe in the neighborhood—you can find out easily enough, can't you?—and keep the change."

"Thank you, Mr. Hudson."

"Don't thank me—yet. By the time you get through paying my rent and my small indebtednesses, you may find yourself confronted by a deficit." He put on his coat. "Call me a taxi, will you?"

"Sure."

The janitor left, came back a few minutes later saying that the machine was waiting, and Hudson turned on him with a question.

"Mike", he said, "didn't you tell me once that you used to be on the force before you commenced bullying defenceless and heatless tenants for a living?"

"I was that, Mr. Hudson. I was a detective attached to Second Branch Headquarters and upon me sowl—if it hadn't been for that dirthy, jealous blackguard of a Sarsfield Mahaffy that used to be captain of—"

"Then", Hudson cut into the other's reminiscences, "you are the lad to put me wise to something that has been puzzling me. Suppose you had made up your mind, suddenly, almost at an hour's notice, to go on a trip, on a private yacht let us say. Supposing, furthermore, nobody knows of your intention except the skipper and a girl. Supposing, finally, that a third party all at once pops the information at you that he knows all about your going—name of the ship, skipper's name, and all that—what would you make of it?"

"That either the captain or the girl has peached on ye, Mr. Hudson."

"Let's assume, for the sake of argument, you are absolutely certain that neither the one nor the other has given you away—that there wasn't even a reason why they should?"

"Somebody must have overheard ye."

"Oh—?"

Langley Hudson thought of the sailor whom Jeremiah Hicks had ordered aft when they had talked about the Earl of Knutes-

wold and his old feud with Sassoon ben Yakoub Sami. But—no! At the time he had had no intention of going to Calcutta aboard the Marylin Martha Hicks. That wasn't it. So he shook his head.

"Let's dismiss that possibility, too, Mike," he said.

"Well then—mebbe ye telephoned—to the captain or the girl, did ye?"

"By ginger, I did! How did you guess?"

"Faith an' it's an old trick", replied the ex-detective. "Wire-tappin', listenin' in, they calls it amongst the swell crooks. I know several people who can do it." He picked up the suit cases. "Are you ready, sir?"

"Yes."

A minute later, the taxicab whirred on its way. Langley Hudson felt disturbed, ill at ease.

Wire-tapping, he thought. That meant that Adrian Van Kraaft for reasons of his own and doubtless unsavory reasons—for it was ludicrous to assume that he had just happened to listen in on Lady Violet Frayne's telephone calls that one afternoon he chanced to be there—was keeping track of the English girl's conversations.

Why? Some gallant intrigue? Jealousy?

No. That was out of the question. Even the veriest tyro in the psychology of love would know that Lady Violet was far too fastidious, far too sure of herself, to be fascinated by the spurious blandishments of a man of Adrian Van Kraaft's type.

What then?

Too, how had Van Kraaft found out that Captain Hicks had changed his route? The latter had made a slurred allusion to something in his past, some dealings he had had with either the Earl of Knuteswold or Sassoon ben Yakoub Sami.

And now did Van Kraaft fit into this puzzle picture?

Finally, what about the letter he was supposed to deliver in Tunis? A simple enough commission, and the other, who was notoriously hard up, had given him ten thousand dollars for it!

For a moment, as the machine purred down Fifth Avenue gently outlined with its double curve of electric lights against the early winter evening, Langley Hudson debated with himself if he should return both the money and the envelope to Adrian Van Kraaft; but he decided that it was too late. He had no time to lose; too, ten thousand dollars was ten thousand dollars, and a bargain was a bargain.

"Step on the gas!" he called to the driver.

He felt curiously homesick. Of course he had been, always as somebody's guest, to Paris and London, and on frequent, seasonable trips to Florida and California. But he was a bred-in-the-bone New Yorker for whom the Far West commenced just the other side of Yonkers and whose ideal in life was a rocking chair on the corner of Forty-Second Street and Broadway.

Let others romance and rhapsodize about the wonders of the Grand Canyon, the Yosemite Valley, and Yellowstone Park. He, personally, preferred the view from the top of the Woolworth Building or from the Plaza roof over Central Park. And now, for some mad, erratic reason which was not clear even to himself, he was going to a country where, judging from all accounts, they put curry powder in the Jack Rose cocktails and garlic in the biscuits Tortoni, where there were no first-nights, no Metropolitan, no Ritz Lounge to browse over a cup of aromatic Turkish coffee and a glass of Grand Marnier, no Waldorf peacock alley, no Winter Garden gang-plank, no Great White Way, no Fifth Avenue Easter parade, and no Horse Show, and which seemed to be inhabited more or less exclusively by hairy natives, elephants, parrots, monkeys, fifty-seven varieties of flying and crawling horrors, and a great deal of woolly heat.

Yes, he felt homesick; and the more so as it was one of those regular, old fashioned, Christmassy December early-evenings, with a lot of snow coming down and thudding softly, dreamily, and occasional sleigh bells competing with the clash and clonk of street cars, and motor cars shooting past with gleaming brasses; with men and women hurrying along, coat collars upturned, finger tips working frantically to keep off the nipping cold, and the breath standing out like gray plumes before the wind, but the Free-

masonic smile of coming holidays on every face; with the shop windows crowded with all the charming things Paris makes so that New York may be extravagant, and the residences of older New York—the New York which he loved best, after all—blinking with deep-set windows against the street and with the snug flames of open hearths reddening the panes.

Then the ferry, its siren tooting drunkenly, arrogantly, and Manhattan slipping away—with a last view, as he looked back, of here and there beyond the soft snow veil a glitter of sign writing, the flapping blue and red of a flag, a boasting, pretentious skyscrapper stabbing up, the russet face of an old house staring bravely through the whirling flakes, and a feather of steam floating up a chimney and perching above like a bird before melting into the general whiteness.

Came Hoboken, looming out of the low, coiling shore fog in a neat checker board pattern of white and gray and bister brown, punctured by the spires of square churches, the solid bulk of some braggart warehouse, the rigging and funnels and smoke stacks of ships that rode breast high above the stone quays.

A few minutes later, the taxicab drew up along-side the dock of the Marylin Martha Hicks and, hurrying on, a suit case swinging from each hand, the first man Langley Hudson met was Captain Jeremiah Hicks, engaged in a grumbling and acrimonious altercation with a Swedish boss wharfinger.

" What is the trouble?" asked Hudson.

And he was startled, yet not exactly surprised, when the other told him that, at the last moment, he had decided to change the outgoing route of the Marylin Martha Hicks and to go via Tunis and the Suez Canal, instead of via Panama, Manila, and the China treaty ports.

" Some extra cargo came just about a half hour after you telephoned, Langley, and the fellow who's shipping the stuff—"

"Who is he?" Hudson cut in, trying to appear ingenuous.

But the captain shook his head.

" Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies," he replied, sagaciously. " Anyway, the fellow who's shipping the stuff made it worth my while changing my route. Just a few boxes he's shipping but, judging from the price he paid, they must contain diamonds and pearls. Of course I had to transfer some of the Far Eastern cargo to another ship, and what with these damned stevedores' unions and the forty-four hour week and a lot of silly land-lubbers who call themselves port authorities and who don't know the difference between the starboard backstays and the top-gallant yards and make up for it by inventing new regulations every time you show 'em your ship's manifest—well."

He was silent, and bit off a liberal half-inch of chewing tobacco.

Then, as Hudson was about to walk on:

"Whole lot of packages came for you. I had them put in the top deck cabin. You can have that or the one on the captain's check, next to mine. See you later, young fellow."

Came twenty hectic, crowded, hurried minutes, in which Langley Hudson worked as he had never worked before; untying strings, unpacking, rearranging the few articles of movable furniture, exciting then pacifying Wan Hai, the pessimistic Cantonese cook, and returning triumphantly with a number of empty glass jars and tall tumblers and pottery mixing bowls, handling broom and dustpan, interviewing the Cantonese once more and borrowing a few lengths of treasured Chinese brocade, getting cursed out by the ship's carpenter but obtaining the loan of hammer and tacks, shifting his suit cases to the cabin on the captain's deck, and laughing all the while.

Finally, with the help of two grinning Liverpool wharf rats who did duty as able-bodied seamen and who managed to escape the vigilant eye of Mr. Branson, the mate, he finished everything to his satisfaction, and stepped on the lower deck just in time to see Lady Violet Frayne, with the little Hindu *ayah*, Madamsena, closely by her side, and gallantly escorted by Captain Jeremiah Hicks.

The latter ran on ahead when he saw his friend and winked at him facetiously.

" Say," he whispered, " ain't that the old pirate's daughter?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Saw her picture in the paper." He chuckled.

"What's funny?" demanded Hudson, a little aggressively.

"Oh—nothing. I leave you now. Got half a dozen things to attend to. But see to it that your visitors get off in time. We're off in the shake of a lamb's tail, and this old beauty of a ship of mine has a way of sneaking out of port—trick she learned in the old black-birding days in the South Pacific, I guess, when we had to chase ourselves to escape some revengeful cannibal war prau. 'Gumshoe Martha' they call the Marylin Martha Hicks over in Malaysia. So long, young fellow," and he walked away with his straddling, deep-sea gait, while Hudson hurried on to bow over Lady Violet Frayne's hand.

He looked at her approvingly. She was a charming and graceful figure, her olive face flushed a faint rose with the biting December wind, a little toque pressed deep over her raven hair, and a loose chinchilla coat opening over an afternoon frock of poppy red.

"Perfectly bully of you to come, Lady Violet," he said.

She smiled.

"Oh—I feel just a little responsible."

"Responsible for my going to Calcutta?"

"Yes. You see, I think it was that remark of mine you overheard that night at the Van Kraafts' ball, when I called you —you know—"

"When you called me a rotter?"

"Yes. It was that remark which really caused you to go, wasn't it?"

He laughed.

"It's comical," he said, "how every woman is like every other woman; how they all like to play reformer and guardian angel and *deux ex machina*—even after the event!"

"After—the event?" Lady Violet was puzzled.

"Yes. You see, you called me a rotter —no, no!" as her eye brows went up—"I am not trying to deny the fact that I am one! But you made that remark just—oh —to gossip, to be malicious, the regular social knock-your-neighbor-and-save-your-own-face persiflage stuff. And now you see that I am going away, to work, and you promptly assume—retroactively—that you called me a rotter out of a helpful, sisterly, constructive, social-service sort of spirit."

He looked around him, at the crew hurrying about, the ship getting ready to get under way, and continued rapidly, talking against time. "I am sure that after the angel with the flaming sword booted Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, Eve explained to her better half that she had done the whole thing on purpose—had bitten into the apple and caused Adam to do the same, because she considered it her social and economic duty to see to it that Adam should do a little honest work. Woman!"

"You don't seem to like my sex, Mr. Hudson."

"I adore it, Lady Violet. I let all women be my sisters."

"Only—sisters?" she asked.

"What else?" came his counter query pronounced with a calm, naif indifference that made her bite her lips.

"Care to have a look at the Marylin?" he suggested, after an awkward pause.

"Yes."

And so, followed by the *ayah*, they walked about the ship that was in a bustle of orderly confusion, with the captain talking stertorously to the mate and the latter transmitting the orders, changed as to phraseology and blasphemy, to the crew, with sailors moving in all directions in that strangely deliberate hurry of the seas, coiling gear and splicing and tautening ropes, with davits creaking and cables scraping and the steam coming up in thick, greasy gusts and the engines stamping and buzzing like a disturbed bee hive and the carpenter mysteriously busy over the taffrail-log.

It had become quite dark. Evening had dropped opaquely, smashing the whirling snow with its black immensity, and the streets of Hoboken, a stone's throw away, were like an edge of drab vapor, tenebrous, sad, chilly, with just here and there a harridan flicker of yellow and red where saloon or dive lay in ambush for those who go down to the sea in ships.

The Marylin Martha Hicks moved a

little, tilted up suddenly toward the dark sky line, grunted protestingly with a belching intake of steam, slanted to her scant steerageway, seemed to skid on the swirling water, then straightened out again, again tilted—

A soft clash of crockery came from the galley. Aft, the riding-lights snickered like ironic stars.

Lady Violet shivered and drew her fur coat closely about her.

"I fancy I'd better be going," she said, holding out her hand.

Langley Hudson shook his head.

"Heavens, no!" he replied. "You've oodles of time. You see, I want to talk to you about that romance we spoke of this afternoon—"

"What romance?"

"When your father eloped with the hill rajah's daughter—your mother."

"The days of romance are over."

"So you said. Well—let's talk about it. But not here. I am an artist at heart. I demand a proper *milieu*, proper surroundings." He led the way toward the top deck cabin and opened the door. "Let's go in here. Quite proper, you know, with that little Hindu chaperon of yours."

"I s'pose so."

Followed by her *ayah*, she walked inside, and gave a cry of surprise. For the cabin was a mass of flowers—flowers hiding in their profusion the modest vessels in which they were arranged and which Langley Hudson had borrowed from the cook—white tulips, white gardenias, white orchids and sweetpeas, with here and there a vivid, tawny splotch of tulip and exotic rose. Port hole and transom were shaded by strips of Chinese brocade, so was a low box transformed into an impromptu book case on which was a collection of books and magazines, and the nautical dresser-bureau glittering with an array of bottle and toilet articles. The drawers were half open, and Lady Violet gave another cry of surprise.

"Why, Mr. Hudson," she laughed, pointing. "Lingerie! Boudoir caps! Robes de nuit! And a dozen other feminine things you, being a mere man, are not supposed to know about!" She stepped nearer. "And what exquisite taste! How delicate! How lacy! Why—has that nice, red-bearded captain who met me on the dock taken a blushing young bride unto himself?"

"Not that I know of."

"But—whom do these things belong to?"

"They belong to you!"

"To me?"

"Yes. I want you to be comfortable. It's going to be such a long trip, you know—"

And, suddenly, he jumped back across the threshold and locked the door from the outside; and, the next moment, the Marylin Martha Hicks was well under way, with a shrieking and tooting and clonking that drowned Lady Violet's cries, while Langley Hudson lit a cigar, walked over to the rail, and waved his hand in the general direction of New York.

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.

WISE

BY MILTON RAISEN

HE does not know, and therefore writes
The detailed ecstasy of love,
Of passion-kisses, perfumed nights,
Of cupid and the dove.

But I who felt the common kiss,
Where common-scented flowers grow,
On such a common night as this,
I cannot write—I know.

The Middle Bedroom

by

H. de Vere Stacpoole

A "DIFFERENT" STORY

ARE all living creatures represented in the human race, so that we find shark men—or, at least, men with the instincts of sharks—sloth men, cat men, tiger men, and so on? Le Brun started the idea, I believe, and I take it up as bearing on the case of Sir Michael Carey, of Carey House, near Innis Town, on the west coast of Ireland.

I would ask another question before starting on my story: If a man were to give way to his natural instincts and retire from the world would he develop, or, rather, degenerate, along the line of his main instinct? Who can say? I only know that Sir Michael, the builder of the house that took his name, was known a hundred years ago amongst the illiterate peasantry as "the spider," that so dubbed on account of his mentality and general make-up, he lived alone in his house like a spider in a gloomy corner, that, according to legend, the devil came and took him one dark night, leaving neither rag nor bone of him and that his ghost was reputed to haunt Carey House and the country round, ever after.

The next of kin, Mr. Massy Pope, tried to live in the house. He left suddenly on account of the "loneliness" of the situation and succeeded in letting the place, with the shooting and fishing rights, to a hard-headed Englishman named Doubleday.

Doubleday didn't believe in ghosts nor care about them, snipe was his game and cock; he was a two-bottle man—it was in 1863—and if he had met with a ghost any time after ten o'clock he would scarcely have seen it, or seeing it, would not have cared. But his servants were the trouble. They left one day in a body, being soft-headed folk and unfortified and having a very good reason of their own. Then some years elapsed and the story of the next let, as told to me by Micky Feelan one day, out shooting, was as follows:

"When Mr. Doubleday had gone, sor, the house laid empty, spilin' the country for miles round, not a man would go into the groun's to trap a rabbit nor a woman enter its doors to lift a window, and Mr. Pope squanderin' his money to advertise it. That's the man he was, he wouldn't be bet by it, rowlin' in riches what did it matter to him whether it lay let or empty, not a brass farthin', but he wouldn't be bet by it, it was like a horse that wouldn't rise at a ditch and he'd canther it back and try it again and lather it over the head, squanderin' his money in the advertisin' till all of a sudden he got a rise out of a family be name of Leftwidge.

"Dublin people they were, with a grocer's shop in old Fishamble Street. There was a dozen of them, mostly childer and

one red-headed strip of a girl to do the cookin'. Twenty pound a year was the rent, I've heard tell, and they lived mostly be trappin' rabbits, the boys doin' a bit of fishin' and the groceries comin' from the shop where the ould father stuck at work in his shirt sleeves while the rest of the lot was airin' themselves in the counthry.

"Be jabers, they were a crowd, ghosts! Little they cared about ghosts shamblin' about widout shoes or stockin's and the boys wid their sticks and catapults killin' hens be the sly and maltreatin' the country boys like Red Injuns, the shame of the county.

"Norah Driscol was the name of the red-headed slip and many a time me mother has seen her wid her apron over her head rockin' and cryin' wid the treatment of them boys and the botheration of the rest of them, for there was a matter of a dozen or more, rangin' like the pipes of an organ from Micky the eldest son six fut and as thin as a gas pipe, to Pat the youngest not the height of your knee.

"Well, sor, the ghost lay aisy at the sight of the lot of them and didn't let a word out of it for a full month. Then, one day, Norah Driscoll was goin' along the top flure passage whin the band begin to play. The bedrooms was mostly on that passage and the house agent had warned them against havin' anythin' to do with the middle most bedroom, for, says he, there's rats there that can't be got rid of and that's the cause of all the trouble in the lettin' of the house, says he. It would be a hundred and twenty a year rent, only for them rats, says he, so they're worth a hundred a year to you if you just keep the door shut and don't bother about the noises they do be makin' at odd times—sometimes it's like as if they was sneezin' and blowin' their noses and sometimes it's like as if they was walkin' about with their brogues on and sometimes it's like as if they was cursin' and swearin'. Don't you mind them, he says, but keep sayin' over and over to yourself they're worth a hundred a year to me. That's what he tould Mrs. Leftwidge.

"Well, sor, Norah was moonin' along the passage, sent to fetch a duster or somethin' when she opened the dure of the middle bedroom be mistake. There was no furniture in it, not as much as a three-legged stool and the blind was down, but a shaft of the sun struck through be the side of the blind and there in the middle of the flure was sittin' a little old man dressed as they was dressed a hundred years ago in an ould brown coat wid brass buttons and all and the face of him under his hat topped the sight of him, for Norah said it wasn't a face, but more like one of those masks the childer make out of a bit of paper with holes in it.

"The screech she let out of her as she banged the dure to, brought the family runnin' from down-stairs, and the boys slammed open the door to get at the chap but there wasn't a speck of him.

"'It's a rat she saw,' says Mrs. Leftwidge, 'Down-stairs wid the lot of you or I'll give you the linth of me slipper—and open that dure again if you dare.'

"Down they went, Norah bawlin' and the old woman pushin' her and nothin' more happened that day till the night. Half a dozen of the little ones slep' in the same room with their mother to save the light and be under control and gettin' on for twelve o'clock the old woman, snorin' wid her mouth wide, was woke from her slape be one of the childer.

"'Mummy,' says he, 'listen to the bagpipes.' She lifted herself on her elbow, but, faith, she could have heard it with her head under the clothes, for the dhrone of the pipes filled the house comin' from the middle bedroom.

"Next minit the whole lither of them was in the passage, the old woman with a guthering candle in her hand, and as they stood there keepin' time with their teeth to the tune of the pipes, the noise of it suddenly let off and the handle of the middle bedroom dure began to turn.

"They didn't wait to see what was comin' out; no, your honor, you may bet your life they didn't, they was half of them under their beds the linth of that night and next mornin' they began to pack to go back to Dublin, gettin' their old traps together and strippin' the garden to take back wid them in hampers. Micky, the second boy, was sent runnin' to hire two cars to take them to the

station, for the railway in those days had just come to Drumboyne, twelve miles away, and whilst he was gone they tore up the potatoes and cut the cabbages and faith they'd have taken the flurin' away if they'd had manes to shift it.

"Well, there they were strapped and ready to go when Mrs. Leftwidge, sittin' in her bonnet on the boxes and atin' a sandwidge, suddenly stops her chewin' and looks about her like a hen countin' her chickens:

"'Where's Pat?' says she.

"Pat was the youngest, as I've tould you, sor, a bit of a chap in petticoats, no size at all and always gettin' astray.

"'I don't know,' says one of the boys, 'but faith, I hear him shoutin' somewhere up-stairs.'

"Up-stairs they all rushed led be the woman and they hadn't no sooner reached the top passage than they seen Pat bein' whisked through the open dure of the middle bedroom, dragged along be somebody's hand, and when they reached the dure, there was Pat bein' dragged up the chimney.

"It was one of them big ould chimneys a man could go up, and the heels of the child was disappearin' when Mrs. Leftwidge lays hold of a fut and pulls, bawlin' murder Irish, till the thing in the chimney let go its holt and Pat comes into the grate, kickin' like a pup in the shtrangles and liftin' the roof off with the hullabaloo of him.

"She tuck him be one fut like a turkey and down she runs with him and into the garden and there when they'd soothed him he gives his story, how he'd been playin' in the passage when a little ould man, the funniest ould man he'd ever seen pokes his head out of the bedroom dure. Pat, poor divil, bein' sated at his play couldn't get his legs under him wid the fright, he could only sit and shout whilst the head of the little ould man pops in and out of the dureway like the head of a tortoise from its shell.

"Then out he comes the whole of him and grabs the child be the hand and whisks him off into the bedroom and goes up the chimney heels and first haulin' Pat after him. Goes up like a spider.

"Well, they was sittin' about on the boxes they'd hauled out of the house waitin' for the cars and tryin' to squeeze more of the news out of Pat, when up comes the cars wid Sergeant Rafferty and Constable O'Halloran on wan of them, to see they weren't takin' the house away wid them—they'd got that bad name in the county.

"And when the sergeant heard the story, up he went to the bedroom and down he comes again.

"'Here,' says he to O'Halloran, 'take this lot off to the train and go to the barracks and fetch me two carbines wid buck shot ca'tridges—the same ould Forster used to shoot the boys with, bad luck to him—and look slippy,' says he, 'for I'm a brave man, but I don't want to be no longer here be myself than's needful.'

"Off the cars went wid the family packed like flies on them an' in a matter of a couple of hours back comes the constable wid the guns. Up they go to the bedroom.

"'Stick your head up the chimney,' says the sergeant.

"'I'll be—if do,' says the other.

"'Well, then, shut it,' says the sergeant, 'and keep still.'

"They listened but they didn't hear nothing at all. Then the sergeant begins talkin' in a loud voice, winkin' at the other.

"'There's nothin' there,' says he, 'it was a ghost they saw and it's gettin' oneasy I am meself. Let's get off back to Drumboyne and have a glass and lave the ould house to look afther itself.'

"'I'm wid you,' says the constable and downstairs they tramped, makin' as much noise wid their big boots as a rigiment of soldiers. Then in the hall they sits down and begins takin' off their boots.

"'All the same,' says the constable as he pulled the laces, 'I'd be just as aisy in me mind if I was three miles off trampin' on the road to Drumboyne.'

"'So would I,' says the sergeant, 'and it's there I'd be only I'm thinkin' of promotion."

"'I'm thinkin' of ghosts,' says the constable wid the boot-lace in his hand.

"'Go on unlacin' your boots,' says the other, 'and don't be a keyoward, this is no ghost. Ghosts can't pull childer up chimneys.'

"'Faith, you seem to know a lot about them,' says the constable, 'but it's I that

am thinkin' it's holy water and Father Mooney ought to be on this job instead of you and me and guns.'

" 'And how would you get holy water up the chimney? ' axes the sergeant.

" ' Wit a squirt,' replies him, 'and how else.'

" ' Squirt yourself out of them boots,' says the sergeant, ' or it's me ram-rod I'll take to you, and now follow me,' he says, ' and walk soft.'

" Wid the loaded guns in their hands up they wint makin' no more sound than shaddas in a wall, and when they got to the room down they squats one on each side of the chimney.

" They hears nothin' for a while, but the tickin' of the sergeant's watch and the sounds of their own hearts goin' lub-a-dub. Then comes a cough. It wasn't a right sort of cough, for, let alone that it was comin' down a chimney, it sounded to be the cough of a chap that had died for want of water and lain in a brick kiln afther.

" The constable said next day he'd have been up and off only the sound cut the legs from under him, the sergeant wasn't much better and there they sat sayin' their prayers and listenin' for more.

" They waited near an hour hearin' nothin', and then all at once began a noise, a scratchin' and a scrabblin' like a cat comin' down a drain pipe.

" ' It's comin' down,' shouts the constable.

" ' Begob it's not,' says the sergeant and wid that he shoves the muzzle of his gun up the flue and fires.

" He fired from fright to keep it up, so he said at the inquest, but, he jabers, he brought it down like a cock pheasant, tumblin' and clawin' and when they stretched it out on the flure it was a man right enough. A bit of an ould man as brown as a spider, and there he lay dead as a grouse wid the buck-shot holes in him and not a drop of blood no more than if he'd been made of cardboard.

" ' Cover the face of him,' says the constable, for that was the sort of face he had, better than I can tell you, and havin' nothin' to cover it they turned him face down, and made off runnin' to Drumboyne for the residint magistrit.

" Well, sor, when they took that chimney down they found a room off it, all littered with bones and birds' feathers and rats' tails. It wouldn't do to be tellin' you of that room, more than it had no winda to it and had been built on purpose be Sir Michael Carey when he put the house up. He'd took to live in it, for that was the way his heart was, and at long last he took to live nowhere else, and that was how the sergeant brought him down and he must have been a matter of a hundred and tin years of age, they reckoned.

" He had his bagpipes to cheer him and frighten away tinints and he'd be out be nights scavengin' for food—they say they found the bones of childer in the room, but may be that was a lie got be him tryin' to drag Pat Leftwidge up the flue—but faith I wouldn't put it beyond him. For that chap was a spider, sor, they said his face was the face of a spider, and his arms and legs no better.

" He'd begun in the shape of a man, maybe, but the spider in him got the bether of him. Look, there's all there's left of the house, sor, thim walls beyond the trees. They set a light to it to get shut of that room and if you knew the truth of it all you wouldn' blame them."

PERSISTENCE

BY WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR

MY hopes retire; my wishes as before
Struggle to find their resting-place in vain:
The ebbing sea thus beats against the shore;
The shore repels it; it returns again.

The Hidden Kingdom

by Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton

Authors of "The Thunder of Doom," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

ARLEY CARR, hunter, traveler, and mining prospector, had come to New York to visit his friend and fellow-traveler, Ross Burton. Behind the cigar-counter of his hotel he saw a girl who was the first of her kind to set him "going."

Before he could turn her haughty reception of his friendly advances, she was kidnaped and carried off to the Canadian Northwest. At least, as far as Carr could find out, the man who had registered at the hotel as Arnold Fairfield, left a destroyed message in his room which pointed to that country, and which referred to a certain place as "good prospects."

Carr and Burton decided to follow. After weeks of the most hazardous fortunes in the barren lands, they unexpectedly came upon a mysterious cabin. Next they took up a mysterious trail and entered a hidden valley, formed by a fissure in the earth, and surrounded by high hills. Here they found a small company of men and women, ruled by a democratic king, and with the refinements of civilizations and the peace of plenty much in evidence. The two travelers were cordially received and entertained at a big social function to which all the people were bidden.

Burton danced with the Princess Helen, and Arley Carr found Edna West, the girl of their search, on the arm of the heir apparent. Secretly she warned him to leave before it was too late, but both men refused. They determined to see the thing through.

As Ross whirled through the steps of the dance with the girl of his dreams in his arms, he suddenly caught Arnold Fairfield looking at him with cold malevolence. At each of the three exits of the hall, Fairfield had stationed a man, and Burton thought he knew why.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAWS OF DAREWORLD.

THEIR discovery of the hidden kingdom and the constant activity following had acted as a stimulant upon Ross and Arley which sustained them until the close of the ball at two o'clock in the morning. In their room the reaction came quickly. The weeks of wandering upon the barren grounds, the long period of starvation, the nervous strain of fighting hopelessly in the bitter cold, had weakened them more than they knew.

Ross pulled off his clothes without a word and tumbled into bed. Arley undressed more slowly, but his companion did not know when he came to bed.

It was dark when Ross wakened. He turned on the electric light and learned that it was four o'clock, but whether in the morning or afternoon he did not know. He went back to bed, but a few minutes later he heard voices in the corridor.

"Come on, Arley," he said as he threw back the blankets. "We've slept the day through."

"What's the use?" demanded Arley as he rubbed his eyes. "We can't get out anyhow. The door's locked."

"Locked!"

Ross sprang across the room and lifted the latch. The door swung open.

"It was when I went to bed," insisted Arley. "Just as I was turning out the light I heard a voice and thought some one was there listening to what we might be saying. I started to pull the door open to

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for November 22.

see, but it was locked on the outside. I waited a while and tried it again, but it wouldn't open."

Ross again opened the door and looked at the outside.

"There is a lock, a big one," he said. "Hasp and staple and padlock."

He walked across to the two windows. They had opened one when they went to bed, but now for the first time he saw that on the outside was a lacing of iron bands."

"This is no guest-room!" he exclaimed. "It's a cell."

"I told you last night they weren't going to let us go," said Arley. "She said we wouldn't get away unless we went before they expected it. Now we'll have a sweet time getting out."

Ross was watching him as he spoke and instantly each man knew that from that time forward their interests were opposite. Ross knew that Arley, having found Edna West, and certain she had been kidnaped, would not rest until he had devised a means of getting her away.

And Arley knew—had known from the moment he had first seen Ross watching the Princess Helen—that his friend would have no desire to get away; that he would be content to remain for a time at least.

He did not blame Ross. He was sufficiently thankful that Ross had come as far as he had; had endured hardship and faced danger without complaint, without reference to what both had come to believe was a wild-goose chase.

Ross, because he had never been in love before; because he held a duty to a friend to be the first obligation, was somewhat embarrassed.

"Look here, Arley!" he exclaimed. "If that door were locked last night they certainly are not going to let us go, and our chance has vanished. They have unlocked it now because every one else is awake, and we will be watched constantly. So long as we don't make any breaks for the outside, and pretend we are guests, I don't think there is any danger. We can keep our eyes and ears open and learn what this peculiar kingdom is, why it is here, and later find a chance to get away. In any event, there is no hurry."

"You're right there," was the answer. "We have all the time in the world."

"Not too much, Arley," said Ross gently. "Miss West told me last night she was kidnaped and brought up here to be the wife of Prince Acton."

Arley stared at him for a full minute. Then he whispered:

"Does she want to marry him?"

"I don't think so, but from what she told me she must do that or simply be wiped out. What I can't understand is the blood-thirsty attitude she ascribes to these people. You never saw a more gentle lot than at the dance last night."

"When is this wedding coming off?" asked Arley.

"I don't know, but we can find out, and also learn how she feels about it."

"There's one crook among them," announced Arley emphatically, "and that's the old lad I saw at the Wallace in New York. I saw him last night and he looked as if he wanted to cut my throat."

There was a gentle knock at the door and Ross opened it. Without a word of greeting a little old man slipped in backwards and quickly closed the door.

"It's Fairfield!" exclaimed Ross as their visitor turned to face them.

"Fairfield, eh!" cried the old man in what was nothing less than a snarl. "Thanks for that slip, young gentleman. Now I am sure of my course."

"Where are you heading in?" demanded Arley belligerently as he arose from the edge of the bed where he had been sitting.

"You have shown that yourself, or your friend has," was the reply. "It happens that my name is Adam Codner. It is only in New York that I am known as Arnold Fairfield. No one in Dareworld knows that I use the name."

"I see," said Ross. "You mean that you know—"

"I mean this!" interrupted Codner fiercely. I mean that I know who you are and why you came. I am not a fool, and I suspected that something like this might happen. But you can rest assured of one thing. You'll never be able to report to your deceitful employers what you have found. You will never leave here alive."

Neither Ross nor Arley spoke, and Codner, after glaring at them a moment, demanded:

"Why did you come? What made you think you could get in here and find out if I were telling the truth? How did you even know where Dareworld is? You and your employers think you are clever, but you'll get the measure of Adam Codner before you have finished."

The old man was working himself into a fury, and he shook a fist beneath Ross's nose and danced before him.

"Look here," commanded Arley as he grasped Codner by the shoulder and shook him. "Calm down and talk sense. We don't know what you are driving at."

"You know every word of it," was the reply. "I told those fools in New York not to act until they heard from me. I told them it would take time to engineer the revolution. Why, there is no chance of success yet, and I must be sure that we will succeed before I give the signal."

"So that's it," said Ross, as if he understood all that Codner meant.

"But it's not all!" and again Codner shook his fists at them. "I'm through with your employers. I know where I can interest others, men I can trust, who will wait until I give the word. In the mean time, to keep our secret safe, to prevent the steal you planned, you will be treated as you deserve."

"You don't think there can be a possibility that you are mistaken?" asked Ross.

"I might if you had come alone, but the others one"—and he pointed to Arley—"makes me certain. I remember his face. I know now that I saw him in that office in Wall Street. And then there is your use of my New York name."

"But the king—" Ross began.

"He'll never believe you if you tell him, and you will never have the opportunity to prove your charges."

Codner turned and walked to the door. As he placed one hand on the latch he turned and shook a finger at Ross and Arley.

"That's final!" he exclaimed. "Don't try any of your American tricks. They won't work in Dareworld."

He opened the door and went out, closing it behind him. Ross sprang across the room and jerked at the latch. He was not going to permit any one to lock them in again, but he opened the door to see Codner hurrying down the hall.

For a moment the two stared at each other.

"Do you get that, Arley?" Ross finally demanded. "Do you see? That old crook is planning—"

Another knock interrupted him and he opened the door to find Prince Acton standing in the corridor.

"How do you do, gentlemen?" was his cordial greeting. "May I come in?"

"Certainly," said Ross. "We're only half dressed, but, if you don't mind—"

"Not in the least. I heard you were awake and I was anxious to see you. I'll tell you how it is."

He took a chair and faced them, and before he spoke again his smile vanished. He was a handsome young fellow, but his mouth was weak, his eyes not particularly keen, and his posture, despite his sudden seriousness, was indolent.

"In the first place," he began, "I must warn you two chaps, put you on your guard. My reason is partly selfish, I guess. You see, I want you to live, to continue as our guests, then become our fellow citizens."

Both Ross and Arley looked at him rather blankly and he hastened to explain.

"I'll begin at the beginning," he said. "In 1719 the Hudson Bay Company sent two ships north from Fort Churchill along the western coast of Hudson Bay to explore that country. The party, which was a large one, wintered at Marble Island, where the ships were crushed by the ice.

"They waited a year, but no rescuing ships came. At the end of the second summer one of the men, William Dare, organized a party to go to the mainland and try to get back to Fort Churchill along the coast. A few refused to accompany him, and they remained on Marble Island. It was afterward learned from the Eskimos that they starved to death in 1721.

"The party, led by William Dare, was never heard of again, and it was believed

that they, too, died of starvation on Marble Island. As a matter of fact, their descendants still live. You saw five hundred of them last night, and I myself am a direct descendent of William Dare."

"But—" Ross began in amazement.

"But how did we keep the kingdom of Dareworld secret?" asked the prince. "In this way. Never has any one left Dareworld for the outside world. Only a few times at first were there attempts to escape. From the beginning the punishment was made so drastic that even those who may have wished to see the world have abandoned their desire."

"But—" and this time it was Arley who interrupted.

He was about to ask how Codner had made his kidnaping journey to New York when he realized the consequences of admitting that he had ever seen the old man before.

"But how do we keep abreast of the times?" the prince continued, confident that he had supplied the question. "When I said that no one had ever left Dareworld I meant that no one had ever gone away to live elsewhere. Periodically some one leaves, a trusted subject of his majesty, some one who goes out to gather information, details of new inventions that may be of use to us, books and magazines, the few things we need, and"—he paused a moment—"new blood."

"There are always, we have found, people who, for some reason, cannot keep pace with the world in which they live. They have ability, but they do not succeed. We seek these people, now a mechanic, now an electrician, now a textile worker, again a chemist, an agricultural expert, an instructor from a university."

"We investigate, learn their family history, and then, when we believe we are safe, suggest that they come to Dareworld, keeping the real facts secret, of course. We suggest that they come to a place where they can be leaders in their work, not followers, where they will not be the victims of the competition of modern life, where a competency is assured.

"Every five years we bring in three or four such people, and seldom have our agents made mistakes. All have become loyal and happy citizens of Dareworld."

"You bring in women, too?" asked Ross casually.

"Of course. We need not only the knowledge our recruits have, but we need new blood. You can see how, after nearly two hundred years, practically all of us are related. And the first women, of course, were all brought from England."

"But how do you keep in communication with the outside world without being discovered?" asked Ross.

"Our agents leave in the winter, across the barren grounds. In the United States they begin their work, sometimes in England. There are always old sailing or whaling vessels which may be purchased cheaply. Once unloaded on the west coast of Hudson Bay they are scuttled. They simply disappear."

"The crew!" exclaimed Ross.

"We send out our own men."

"But that costs a lot of money, buying a ship and using it only once," said Arley.

"Yes," answered the prince indifferently, "but it is worth the money."

Whether he had purposely evaded the subject of the kingdom's source of wealth, Ross and Arley could not determine, and they did not press the question.

"So you can see," continued Prince Acton, "why you must be careful. You will never be allowed to leave. If you do make an attempt and are caught, the penalty is death. Dareworld guards very well the secret of her existence."

"But if we gave our word, took an oath that we would never tell?" asked Ross.

"It would be useless even to suggest such a thing, and I must add that even an attempt to escape would not be successful. The precautions taken are complete, and there are hundreds of miles of unpeopled barren grounds all around us."

The prince watched the two men before him and, as he evidently had expected, he saw that his words had brought something other than consternation.

"And if we should decide to stay, agree to remain in Dareworld, what then?" asked Ross at last.

"You would be welcomed, I am sure,

but the vigilance of our citizens would never relax until you were too old and feeble to think of escape. You see, you are the first visitors to the kingdom since it was founded, in two hundred years, the first people from the outside who have discovered our existence. Being the first, trust would not come quickly."

Ross glanced at Arley, whose face was set grimly. He knew his friend was ready to fight, would be glad of the chance.

"What do you say, Arley?" he asked.

"Be calm and remember what I have told you," advised the prince as the young American was about to declare his intention of cutting his way through despite all Dareworld.

"We won't give our word on anything or even decide what we will do," said Ross. "Frankly, I don't think either one of us cares to spend the rest of his life here."

"You would try to escape?" asked the prince with sudden eagerness. "I have heard much of the daring and resourcefulness of your people. I wonder."

Ross and Arley looked at him in amazement, for his eagerness was so unexplainable.

"Listen," and Prince Acton moved his chair closer and spoke in a whisper. "You two agree to stay. Agree to remain here the rest of your lives. Wait a little while, a month, maybe a year. You can stand it that long. And then I will see that you escape, that your escape is certain. I am the heir to the throne, and I can do it. But there is one condition."

"What is that?" demanded Ross.

"That you take me with you."

Before either of the astonished pair could comment there was a knock at the door.

"Not a word of this or you will not even have the chance to escape," whispered the prince fiercely, and he sprang from his chair and opened the door.

"How do you do, uncle!" he cried. "Come right in. I called to inquire as to the health of our guests and was just going. Good afternoon, every one."

He slipped out and Ross and Arley arose to greet the king.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," said his majesty as he shook hands cordially. "I came to take you to breakfast, which has been kept waiting for you. But don't hurry your dressing."

"I am sorry we were so late," apologized Ross, "but we were nearly exhausted when we arrived, and the festivities of last night about finished us. We wakened only a moment ago."

They slipped on their coats and followed the king down the stairs to a small dining-room. A table was set for three, much to Ross's disappointment, for he had hoped that the princess would be present.

"I am breakfasting alone with you," said the king as he sat down, "because I wished to talk with you privately. In the first place, I wish to warn you."

He began, as had Prince Acton, with a brief history of Dareworld, and concluded with almost the identical caution.

"You can see," he said, "what is expected of you; what you must expect. I am not pressing you for a decision, but I want you to understand the terms upon which you remain as our guests. I do not wish to give false impressions.

"I think," continued his majesty after a moment, when neither Ross nor Arley had spoken, "that there may be some inducement for you to remain. Two young men such as you could fit in very well in Dareworld. There is plenty for you to do, and Mr. Carr's knowledge of mining would be valuable to us, and appropriately appreciated."

"It isn't that!" exclaimed Ross. "We have lived in a free country all our lives, and it doesn't quite go down, this being held prisoner by any one."

"I can understand exactly how you might feel. But you can, I trust, see our position."

"Perfectly," said Ross. "I can understand why you should do this, but—"

He hesitated and looked at Arley.

"Don't we even get a fighting chance?" demanded that young man indignantly.

The king looked at them closely for a moment.

"My young friends," he said at last, "I am sorry that I have to do this. The procedure was laid down nearly two hun-

dred years ago, but I am the first ruler of Dareworld who has had to put it into effect. I dislike it. It is actually revolting to me."

He looked at them almost pleadingly for a moment.

"But," he begged, "won't you agree to stay, just for the present? Stay a while under the conditions I have outlined. Then, a year from now, perhaps within a month, I can offer you hope. I can't explain now, but please believe that I am sincere; that I will do what I can for you. I would promise your freedom now if I could, but please bear with me a little while, my friends."

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRUMP CARD.

AT the words which resembled so closely, in a way, those of the crown prince, both of his majesty's guests stared at him in frank amazement. His tone, however, had been so conciliatory that neither Arley nor Ross could suspect him of duplicity. Before either could ask for any assurance that this change would come, the door opened and the Princess Helen entered.

"Good morning," she said as she approached the table. "Or perhaps I should say 'good afternoon,' since I have come to tell you that afternoon tea will soon be served in my apartment."

"Afternoon tea!" repeated Ross. "Why, we have just finished breakfast. We've turned the day around."

"You were tired," reassured the princess, "and father and I thought you should not be disturbed. A ball after your long journey was trying. We should not have asked it of you. But, you see, you are our first guests, and we are selfish. I thought that you might be interested in our afternoon tea gatherings. All of the family who are not busy come in."

"I am sorry, my dear," interrupted the king as he looked at his watch, "but I shall be unable to join you. I leave our guests in your care. Perhaps later I can look in for a few minutes."

He bowed and went out.

"Poor father," said the princess. "His engine is troubling him. Something has been making it act up lately and he spends hours trying to find the cause of it."

As she spoke she turned toward the door through which she had come and the two men followed her.

Ross restrained a gasp of astonishment with difficulty as she ushered them into her living-room. It was wholly in keeping with its wilderness surroundings and yet there was about it such a richness of beauty that it might well be the apartment of a princess.

More quick to sense the manner in which the effect had been obtained, Ross, after one quick glance around the room, realized that there was not an object which was not beautiful in outline and in workmanship. The Princess Helen saw his wonder.

"You like my room?" she asked. "It has been the gift of our people. Every one in Dareworld who could make a beautiful thing has done so for me. Perhaps you would be interested in looking at them. I should love to show them to you."

"Please do," begged Ross. "I have seen beautiful things in the wilderness, and I have imagined a cabin as I should like it to be. But I had never imagined that the symbols of the north country could be combined with such beauty. You have artists, not artizans, in Dareworld."

"It has always been a belief of our people," said the princess, "that every one is happier when he works with his hands. Each of us has been taught to create. The rugs are the work of an old woman. I shall take you to see her sometime. All her designs are her own, and each has a name. Always they have worked into them the symbols of the country in which we live. That one is the spruce-tree, this the rocky shore of Hudson Bay.

"The furniture is the work of John Aird. His father, who was a maker of furniture, taught him. But it is his own idea to have his product in keeping with the world about him in its simplicity, massiveness and beauty.

"The electric-light fixtures are made by another. The draperies were woven by

several different women. Some time I must take you to visit all these people and to see them at their work. I deserve no credit for it all. It has been the gift of my friends."

"Don't you think," said Ross, "that to you belongs the greatest credit? Few of us derive sufficient pleasure from the joy of creation alone, if our efforts are unappreciated. But you have responded to the beauty of their work, have encouraged them to go on, not only by your words, but because your apartment has made it possible for them to know that their handiwork would always be in the company of a beautiful woman."

From another man the words would have been only a social compliment. But from Ross they were wholly impulsive, and the look which accompanied them was unmistakable. He had never said such a thing to a woman before, nor had he ever desired to say it.

Ever since his first out-of-door experience he had rather avoided the opposite sex. He had felt something lacking both in the women of the wilderness and the women of the cities. Those of the primitive places, while they commanded his respect because of their physical prowess, had afronted him in their lack of the refinements of life. The women of his own world had seemed to him both petty and parasitical.

It was not that Ross had set a higher standard than other men. But his heart had been warmed by the dream woman he would have as his mate. It was she who had deadened his interest in others. And it was she who had come alive when he had met the Princess Helen of Dareworld.

In that moment at the ball when he had held her in his arms he had resolved to win her. Then he believed that he would be cautious and not frighten her away with his ardor.

But the princess, mistress of a wilderness home such as he had dreamed of, the patron of all the artists of the hidden kingdom, had routed all his plans and forced from him what had been nothing less than a frank expression of his love.

Only the presence of Arley prevented a declaration. The princess, however, with that social instinct inherent in women, led them safely over the crisis.

"You would both be interested," she said as she walked to a cabinet, "in my collection of laces. It is the work I have been most interested in, and I have done a great deal of it with several other women of Dareworld."

She opened the door and laid the beautiful things in their hands. Hand-tied filet, exquisite thread laces, baby Irish, Mechlin, samples of all the loveliest laces in the world, she spread before them.

Here, too, the designs were of the north country. The spruce-tree, the suggestion of the rocks and the water and the moss of their world, all were worked out in a beauty and simplicity that held the two men dumb with wonder.

It was while they stood there that the door opened and the crown prince walked in.

"Good afternoon," he said as though the greeting were the first of the day. "How do you feel after the ball? I see the princess is showing off her curiosities. Trouble with us all is that we think everything up here is wonderful because we never saw anything else."

Ross was upon the point of voicing an indignant protest because of this ungracious criticism of their hostess when the princess intervened.

"My cousin does not mean that as it sounds," she said. "I am afraid that Dareworld gets on his nerves occasionally, and he cannot bear to see these eternal designs of spruce-trees and rocks and water. But we must have tea at once. All men are cross when they are hungry."

"Where is Edna?" asked the prince.

"She should be here soon. Probably is resting from last night. Why don't you look for her?"

The alacrity with which the prince met this suggestion showed most plainly to the watching Arley where his interest lay. In a few minutes he returned with Edna West.

The next half-hour was difficult for Arley. Ross realized his friend's position and did his best to relieve him in the conversation. This was not hard, for the prince was insatiable in his desire for details of

the world outside and jubilant in his plans to be able at last to introduce some life in Dareworld.

Denied the privilege of visiting New York, he seemed determined to bring as much of the city to his kingdom as possible. Ross found himself rushed from one plan to another. Dances with only the latest steps permitted, a restaurant, cabaret, even an automobile, all shared in the excited projects. Only the appearance of the afternoon tea saved Ross from the necessity of giving instruction in the one step.

The service of the tea with its muffins and marmalade was so typically English that Ross could hardly believe that he was sharing it with a princess in a hidden kingdom in the barren grounds. He even recognized the china as Royal Doulton in its flat tone and solid pattern, but here, too, the designs were of the forest. The Princess Helen saw his interest in it.

"The china was made by the son of a man who once made Royal Doulton in England," she explained. "But I think these patterns are far more beautiful. To me he has worked in all the most attractive of the wilderness symbols."

The princess turned to pour another cup of tea for Arley and Ross looked up to find the clear eyes of Edna West upon him. There was a warning and a request in them which he found disconcerting. But before he could cross the room to her, Prince Acton claimed her attention with such an air of proprietorship that Arley, always watching, found it difficult to restrain himself.

Ross, knowing that his friend's greatest gift lay in efficient action rather than diplomacy, and fearing lest an outbreak by Arley might defeat any plan they might make, was upon the point of an abrupt departure when King Hubert relieved the situation by fulfilling his earlier promise to look in.

"I am so sorry," said his majesty as he took the cup of tea his daughter poured for him, "that I was forced to be late. But you know an engine driver's time is not his own when his engine is not conducting itself properly."

"Perhaps Arley can help you," suggested Ross. "I have never yet found him wanting where practical aid could remedy the trouble."

"Later I shall call upon him," answered the king. "Just now it is working all right. In the mean time I am sure these people would enjoy hearing the story of the time his locomotive led him to gold."

The suggestion was what was needed to supply Arley with a topic of conversation and to enable him to take his brooding eyes from Edna West. He launched into the story with the graphic detail and picturesque humor which only he could impart to any tale. He was so engrossed in his narrative he did not realize that the door had opened until he saw that every one was looking at the malevolent face of Adam Codner. Behind Codner stood another man.

Arley stopped in the middle of a sentence and both he and Ross braced themselves for what they knew would be some blow at their liberty.

"I beg your pardon, princess," Codner began in a voice which shook with vindictive triumph, "but a matter has come to my notice which it is my duty to bring to the king at once. I would not be true to Dareworld should I delay.

"You may remember," he continued as he turned to King Hubert, "that my suspicions were aroused when these two strangers appeared. No one wanders without purpose through the barren grounds in winter. I did not press the matter with you because I could not be sure. They told us that they had come straight to the city. They feigned surprise upon finding that they had reached Dareworld; that they had found a community of people in this wilderness.

"Now I know, your majesty, that they lied. They are, instead, enemies of our people. Before they ever appeared here they had probed our secret. Instead of being the peaceful guests they have pretended to be, they are spies who have visited our mine, who are even now planning to wrest it from us, to steal from us our only means of livelihood, to rob Dareworld of the only industry that makes its existence possible."

He stopped suddenly, aware of the dra-

matic value of his accusations. For a moment there was only a stunned silence. Then the princess sprang to her feet. Her eyes shone with an anger no one had ever seen her display before.

"Is this the courtesy of Dareworld?" she demanded. "Is this the way we have been taught to receive wanderers from the barren grounds? For shame, Adam Codner! What do these gentlemen want of our gold? Better that it all be lost than that we be guilty of such suspicion and hatred."

"I knew at the ball last night," answered Codner, "that they were fast worming their way into the confidence and the liking of our young people. And I knew that if I would save Dareworld I must act quickly. I have said nothing except what I know to be true. They cannot deny it in the face of the proof I have to offer."

He turned suddenly and, taking a rifle cartridge from his companion's hand, laid it before the king.

"That cartridge," he continued gloatingly, "will not fit any rifle ever owned in Dareworld. It was found by Herbert Shackell, here, under one of the bunks in the sleeping camp at the mine. If you doubt my word, ask these men to produce their rifles. And if you wish confirmation of my story, ask the man who found the cartridge, and whom I have brought to answer your questions."

Instantly Ross was on his feet.

"Your majesty," he said, "there is no need to send for our rifles. I will confirm Mr. Codner's statement that the cartridge fits mine. I will admit, too, that we were both at the mine. It was the mine which saved our lives. I fell against the door of one of the buildings, exhausted from cold and hunger. The fire and the food we found there revived us and told us that we should find people in a wilderness where we expected to see no one.

"Our only mistake was in not telling you at once that we knew of the mine. But I am sure that you will understand when you consider our position. We knew nothing about you, whether you would be friendly or otherwise. We had inadvertently stumbled upon your secret, had learned of a mine in a country where no one in the outside world suspected the presence of minerals. Had you known we were there it might have led you to consider us dangerous. And because we could not afford to place ourselves in that position we kept silent."

Ross looked at the king with unflinching eyes.

But before his majesty could answer him, however, he was forestalled by the impassioned denunciation of Adam Codner.

"Do you think," demanded the old man as he shook his fist at Ross and his eyes glittered with hatred, "that I will believe such a story? You may win some belief in Dareworld, where the people have been made too trusting, too credulous, by their isolation.

"But remember, you miserable spies, that it is with Adam Codner, not Dareworld, you have to deal. I shall protect our interests. Your majesty, for the sake of your people, do not allow yourself to be misled and gulled by such a story. I demand that you do your duty to the people who trust you and put these spies in the place where they belong, the prison of Dareworld."

"Is it not strange," the cool voice of the Princess Helen broke in upon his passionate outburst, "that Adam Codner should display such anger and such feeling concerning the disposition of these gentlemen whom he calls enemies? Such hatred is not becoming toward a political prisoner."

There was something so baiting in the remark Ross felt that the princess believed in him, that she resented with all the loyalty of a vigorous faith the accusations of the old man. But before he could even express his gratitude with his eyes the king began to speak.

"I will not say," he began slowly, "that I doubt your word. Your story could be true. But as Mr. Codner, who, I believe, has only the interests of Dareworld at heart, has said, I owe it to my people not to be too trusting, not to jeopardize their interests because of a personal feeling.

"And so, gentlemen, I shall have to ask you to occupy the prison until the matter

can be sifted, until the truth of your story can be fully established."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MIDNIGHT VISIT.

"YOU can call this a peaceful bunch if you want to," said Arley when the door of their room in the Dare-world prison had been locked and they were alone, "but they wouldn't think any more of putting a fellow out of the way than a rabbit."

Ross did not answer. He had been walking about the room, examining it curiously.

"At least," he finally said, "they try to make things easy for any one they don't happen to want around. Look at this place. You'd never imagine it was a cell."

There were bars at the two large windows, but the room was built of wood, not stone, there was a fur rug on the floor, and in addition to a large double bed there was a table with several books upon it, a connecting bathroom and a stove.

"I'd rather take a chance with the Northwest Mounted," grumbled Arley. "If you got away from them you would have a chance. Here you're safer in jail than anywhere else. At least that old codfish can't get us."

"He certainly has us fixed for the present," said Ross. "It's bad, because the king takes his word without question. I've been thinking about it ever since he sprang that cartridge business. We never had our rifles or cartridges in the sleeping camp. The only time we cleaned them or had them out was once in the cook camp. But it wouldn't have done any good to say that. It would only have weakened our case. So I admitted at once that the cartridge belonged to us."

"Then," concluded Arley quickly, "that old crook has gone to our rooms, stolen a cartridge and planted it. Shackell is his tool."

"But it all means," added Ross, "that Codner is planning some crookedness and is afraid that we will spoil his little game. He thinks he has put us out of the running, and it looks as though he had."

"Oh, it's not so bad as that," said Arley. "We'll find out his little game and then we'll put the king wise and get in strong with him. For that matter, we both know what his game is right now, but after the way the king took the old crook's word for everything to-night, we can't do a thing until we have better proof. What he's done is this: Down in New York he offered to sell out this little kingdom, mines and everything else. He plans to start a revolution, do away with the king, and just naturally bust up the place."

"That's what he meant when he told us it wasn't time for the revolution, that we were in too big a hurry," interrupted Ross.

"Sure. He thinks we are hired by these New Yorkers he's been talking to and that we've come up to see if he is telling the truth. He saw me in the Wallace and remembers my face, but he got the place where he saw me mixed. And what cinches it that we've hit on his little scheme is that map I found in his room in the hotel. He drew that, and he was going to show it if he thought he could trust the men he was dickering with. Remember how he had those places marked 'good prospects?'"

"And we have that map," said Ross.

"But it's not enough. Then there's the prince. What do you suppose he meant by telling us that he'd see we got out all right, providing we took him with us?"

"And we found out that some of the miners are high grading."

"And the king has his own little game up his sleeve. I tell you what, Ross, things aren't quite so peaceful and lovely as they seem on the surface. There is a lot doing in this place, and it's up to us to find out what it is. Then we can trade information and maybe save our own necks."

"There is one man I would trust from what I have seen of them so far," said Ross.

"I know. You mean the king. He's on the square, that old fellow, all right, but he's too simple, Ross. Codner or the prince could fool him easy on any proposition. And I'll bet they're both working together against the old boy. Between you and me, I think they'll beat him, and it's up to us to be on the winning side."

"You mean we ought to take up the prince's proposition?"

"First chance. You can see he's crazy to get out of this place. No more Dareworld for him. He wants to smell the smoke and see the lights. He'd a darn sight sooner be scattering some of their gold along Broadway than lording it over this unheard-of place."

"He has all the makings of a sport, all right, but why, if he and Codner are in together, should one threaten us and the other offer us a chance?"

"That's just another thing we've got to find out," said Arley. "And I'm for joining in with the prince. He wants to get out, and he needs us to help him. He gave everything away when he came to our room. That's one thing about these people, all except Codner. They're like children. If we join in with the prince and run his game for him we'll fool all of them and get away."

"But Miss West?"

"That's one condition we'll make. She's to go with us. She's to go back to New York. After she gets there, and the prince and me, too, then it's up to the best man."

Ross did not comment but continued to pace the floor. Arley added further arguments as to why they should cast their lot with Price Acton, but when his friend finally stopped before him it was to say:

"Maybe you're right, Arley. Maybe they can start a revolution and get away with it. But I'm going to stick to the king. His game is on the square at least, and it's the kind of a game you and I want to play. And with what we know, and what we can do to Codner, we will beat the other outfit."

Arley looked at Ross closely but he did not speak.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking, all right. You think it's because he's her father. But that isn't all, Arley. I like the old fellow. He's simple and he's sincere, and he's a fine old chap. Even if he did throw us in jail he did it because he believed it to be the right thing. But if we play square with him, and help him in whatever Codner and Prince Acton do, we'll be on the right side."

"But how is that going to get us out?"

"I don't know. May be it wouldn't, though I would trust the king's generosity and sense of fair play. But the point is this, Arley. If Codner puts his plan through, whatever it is, you can rest assured that it is something that is going to betray the people of Dareworld. He'd do it, and Prince Acton would do it, and after seeing that crowd of happy, contented people at the ball, after hearing what little we have of the way they live and work, I can't imagine a worse crime than busting up this hidden kingdom. It would mean that five hundred people would be thrown out into a strange world, that their happiness would end. Just that alone would prevent my ever agreeing to any plan proposed by Codner or Acton."

"At that, Codner hasn't shown any wish that we should go in with him," laughed Arley. "He sure seems to hate us."

It was only his way of agreeing with Ross. The mere fact that the king's position was the right one, the square one, settled it for him, once the point was called to his attention.

"But," he continued, "we'd have a gay time with the prince."

"He certainly is crazy to see Broadway," agreed Ross.

"He did? Do you know what he asked me at the dance last night? Wanted to know if I could play poker, and when I said yes he was crazy to learn. He said there never had been any gambling in Dareworld, though they had cards, and I'm booked to teach him draw."

"Do it!" Ross exclaimed. "If we get out of here it's a chance for you to learn what his game is, whether he is in with Codner or has a little scheme of his own to break away from Dareworld. Do it, Arley. Play with him. You can become friendly in a short time and we'll know whether he is merely planning to get out or whether he has anything to do with this revolution Codner spoke of."

For several hours they went over the strange situation, discussing it from every angle. They were interrupted late in the night by the sound of a key turning in the outside door.

" They don't intend to let us stay alone long," laughed Arley. " Someone is coming in all the time."

The prison was not large and from indications had seldom been occupied. Ross and Arley had been led down a short hall which had two rooms on each side, rooms evidently similar to the one they occupied. There had been no guard.

As they waited they heard the outer door opened softly and then closed, but there was no sound of steps in the corridor.

" Codner! " whispered Ross. " He said he wouldn't give us a chance. So long as we are alive he knows there is danger to his scheme. It's late and everyone must be asleep. It's his chance."

As he spoke he tip-toed to the stove and picked up the heavy iron poker which lay beneath it. Arley at the same time grasped the back of a small but heavy chair and, one on either side, they waited at the door.

Still there was no sound in the corridor outside. Both men waited, their improvised weapons raised. The door would swing toward them when opened.

A gentle knock sounded outside their room. Ross and Arley looked at each other and nodded.

" Come in! " called Ross, and they held their weapons ready to strike.

A key was put in the lock and turned.

Ross, pressing against the wall, his poker raised above his head, lifted himself upon his toes, every nerve and muscle tense.

The door swung open slightly. He caught a glimpse of a face.

" Princess! " he cried in a low voice as he sprang back.

Before either he or Arley could lower their weapons the door was pushed open and the Princess Helen entered. As she saw the uplifted poker and chair she stepped backward.

" You wouldn't kill a citizen of Dareworld! " she cried, half in anger, half in consternation.

" We would defend ourselves, princess," answered Ross.

"Defend yourselves! From whom? "

" Codner," answered Arley quickly,, though Ross had tried to warn him.

"Adam Codner! But he would not harm anyone."

" He's told us that we are to be killed," replied Arley, despite Ross's frown, " and we didn't intend to let him and his gang come in here and do it without a fight."

" But that is nonsense. He has always been a gentle old man, next to my father the most influential person in Dareworld. And, besides, he has no right to threaten you."

" He came to our room in the palace before we were up this afternoon," said Ross, taking the conversation in hand now that Arley had made known their position. " He seems to think he saw Mr. Carr in New York and believes we have followed him here for some reason. He accuses us of being spies, and his discovery of the fact that we were at the mine has confirmed his belief."

" But he cannot kill you! " declared the princess. " He has no right! Not even my father can condemn a man to death. The laws of Dareworld guarantee everyone a fair trial."

" I don't think he intended to do it legally," said Ross, and immediately he regetted his statement.

" But he wouldn't murder you! " she cried. " There has never been a murder in Dareworld."

" Perhaps we are mistaken," Ross hastened to say. " But, princess, what are you doing here? You must leave at once before someone finds you."

For the first time she was confused. She looked at the floor, her beautiful face was flushed, and, though her lips opened, no words came.

Arley, alert to the possible situation, quickly stepped forward.

" If you want to speak to my friend alone," he said, " I'll go outside and watch. Then, if anyone comes, I can tell you in time."

He was rewarded instantly by a smile and as he slipped out into the corridor the princess shut the door.

" Won't you be seated? " he asked as he placed a chair.

" No," she answered quickly. " There isn't time. You must hurry."

"But," he stammered, "I don't understand."

"You must hurry," she repeated. "Get away from Dareworld. A storm is on. Your tracks will be covered, and you can have six or eight hours start."

"You mean," he demanded as he stepped closer, "that you have come here, taken these risks, to set us free?"

She nodded. Her face was pale, but there was a light in her eyes which dazzled Ross, robbed him of the power to think.

"Outside there is pemmican, robes, your two rifles, a small sledge," she said at last. "Travel straight southeast and you will strike the coast above Fort Churchill. It is less than four hundred miles, and you can reach it."

"But why?" cried Ross. "Why do you do this?"

She did not speak, but the answer was in her eyes. She may have tried to hide it, may not have known that he saw.

"Princess, my princess," Ross whispered huskily.

Unconsciously he stepped forward, held out his arms, and unconsciously she swayed toward him. He kissed her hair, then her forehead, and when he reached her lips they were waiting for him.

"My princess," Ross repeated in a whisper. "My dream girl. My own."

"And you are my knight!" she cried in a low voice. "Oh, I am so glad you came, so glad you have brought this into my life. It will be my memory to the end. But," and she tore herself from his arms and turned toward the door, "you must hurry. Every minute counts, for they will search far and wide in the morning."

Ross was dazed for a moment by her words. He had forgotten why she had come, had forgotten Codner, had forgotten even that he was in Dareworld. Then he sprang forward and grasped her hands.

"Listen," he whispered. "I will go, but only if you go with me. You cannot stay here. It's a crime to keep you, with all the beautiful world outside. You must come. I'll drag you on the sledge every foot of the way to Churchill. And you will be my princess down there, my queen. Come. We will start."

He went toward the door, half carrying her with him. At first she went willingly, but as he laid his hand on the latch she tore herself free.

"No," she said firmly, "it cannot be. It must not. Were I anyone else, were I only a citizen of Dareworld, I would go. I would go anywhere with you. But I am not. I am the daughter of the king. It was our family that founded Dareworld. It was our family that has kept it together, that is still responsible for the happiness of its people. My father needs me. The people need me. It is not for me to decide. I cannot."

"Dearest," said Ross firmly as he drew her to him, "you must come. You must not be buried here. The world is too big, too free, too beautiful. You deserve happiness. You must have it."

"I could never be happy if I paid for my happiness with that of five hundred people," she answered. "Please don't say any more. It can't be! It can't be!"

"Very well," said Ross simply. "I will stay."

Instantly she was aflame with protest.

"No! No! You must go! You do not know what it means to stay. You don't know all. I haven't told you. No one has. It is death, death if you remain in Dareworld. For my sake, dearest, go now while there is time."

"I will not," declared Ross. "I am not going to run away and leave you. If there is danger for me there is danger for you. Perhaps you have not told me everything, but neither have I told you what I have learned since I came to Dareworld. There is danger to you, to your father, to Dareworld itself."

She drew back in terror, with what Ross believed was loathing.

"Do you mean," she demanded in a whisper, "that Adam Codner was right, that you are a spy, that Dareworld's secret has become known, that the outside world is coming in?"

For the first time since he had reached the hidden kingdom Ross realized that he was, to a certain extent, a spy, that he and Arley had gone into the barren grounds for the sole purpose of finding Edna West.

Perhaps this thought was conveyed to the Princess Helen by his eyes, for she took another step backward.

"I am not a spy!" he declared. "I never heard of Dareworld, and now that I have stumbled upon it I will never speak of it should I escape. No harm will ever come to this kingdom through me. I promise that."

"Forgive me!" cried the princess. "But won't you please go while there is time? For my sake?"

"No, I will not. I don't want to go."

"But if you stay! I am afraid, afraid for you. It would kill me if you remained and anything happened. And there is great danger. I said that Adam Codner was next to my father, the most influential man in Dareworld. His counsel is respected by everyone. He has been our trusted agent to the outside world, and has accomplished wonders. There has never been a word against him until tonight.

"But," and the princess stepped closer and looked up into Ross Burton's face, "please go. I don't know what it is. It is only something I feel when in his presence. I have never spoken even to my father.

"But I am afraid of Adam Codner, not of what he might do to me but of what he might do to Dareworld. I don't know what it is. Only the intuition of a woman tells me of it, but I am confident he is false, deceitful.

"And you, dearest, you, I feel, are to be his first victim. I saw it when he faced you there in my rooms this afternoon. He hates you as I never knew a man could hate."

"But he hasn't frightened me," interrupted Ross quickly. "I want only a fair chance with him. In fact, if I am given time, a day or two, outside this prison, I feel sure that I can—."

The door was opened suddenly and Arley hurried into the room.

"Quick!" he whispered. "Someone is coming. He's at the door now."

The face of the Princess Helen went white.

"What have I done?" she whispered.

"Here," said Ross as he took her hand. "Into the bathroom! You may not be seen."

"But the sledge and the food outside the door!" she answered. "No. Whoever it is, I will stay. My reason for coming is just. I am not afraid."

She drew herself up proudly beside Ross and faced the door. Steps sounded in the corridor. Someone knocked on the door and at the same time pushed it open.

"Father!" cried the girl.

CHAPTER IX.

FATHER AND KING.

KING HUBERT stood in the doorway looking at the three young people before him. He stared as if he did not believe. His lips moved but no sound came, and he moistened them with his tongue.

Neither Ross nor Arley spoke. They could not, so great had been the surprise. The Princess Helen seemed to have been numbed by the shock. She had been prepared for Codner, for anyone except her father.

But she was the first to recover, and her first act was to step to the side of Ross Burton and take his hand in hers.

"This is why I came, father," she said simply. "I had to come. And you must know what I intended to do, if you saw the sledge outside."

Though the king did not speak, the expression of pain and amazement left his face. The light of kindliness and gentleness so habitual to him returned to his eyes, but with it were mingled compassion, sadness and despair.

"Father, you understand?" asked the princess anxiously.

"Yes, my dear, I understand, understand only too well," he answered. "It has come, the thing I have always dreaded, the thing that was inevitable as a result of our seculsion. For your sake, my child, I am inexpressibly glad. The mere fact this has come to you so suddenly only makes me know it is great, deep, lasting. I can only ask both of you to bear with me, to help me find the best way out."

With a glad little cry the Princess Helen

ran to him and threw her arms about his neck.

"You are the dearest, dearest man in all the world," she whispered, "and dearest of all because you understand, because you trusted me."

The king smiled over her shoulder and patted her back. Then he looked up to find Ross coming toward him.

"Thank you, sir," was all the young man could say as he held out his hand.

"And I would trust you, too," said his majesty as he gripped it. "I knew I could from the beginning. We are an honest, trusting people here in Dareworld, my boy, and perhaps we have learned to recognize those qualities instantly in others."

Ross found his eyes were moist. A great emotion gripped his heart. He had never known his own father, and ever since his first interview with the king he had been attracted more and more by the sweet, kindly nature of the man. From the first he had believed in him, and now that he saw their fortunes were so closely linked the quick affection engulfed him.

"Thank you, sir," he repeated. "Please understand that anything I can do will be done gladly. I am at your service, always."

"Now, my dear," said his majesty as he held his daughter away from him and looked at her, "you must run home. I will take care of the things you brought, and I will be home soon myself. Now I must have a word with Ross."

"And everything will be all right, father?" she asked anxiously.

"Everything," he said with a smile.

"But Adam Codner! I—I am afraid of him, father."

"Nonsense, little girl. Adam has only the interests of Dareworld at heart. He is overzealous, that is all. I am sure I can handle him in this affair."

"But he hates Ross and Mr. Carr; hates them! I saw it in his eyes when he accused them this afternoon."

"You mistook his zeal for hatred, my dear. But run along, now, before some one sees you."

The Princess Helen turned, smiled at Ross, and went out of the door.

"Let us be seated," said the king when he and Ross and Arley were alone. "I want to speak to Ross, but you are friends and it is well that you should both be here.

"In the first place, my boy, I want you to understand perfectly the results of what has happened to-night. You and the only child of the King of Dareworld, a hidden kingdom, have declared their love. I believe it is a great love, as I said, for it has been so sudden and so overwhelming. You, of course, are not of royal blood, but that is unimportant and will be considered later.

"But first let us begin at the beginning. I came here to-night for a purpose. Ever since the accusations made against you this afternoon by Adam Codner I have been troubled. I did not want to believe them. I did want to believe in you. And I came to ask you for the truth."

As he had been when the Princess Helen had asked him if he were a spy, Ross was again confronted with the question of his honesty in declaring that he was not. The naïve method of the king, so powerful because of its directness and its trust, added to his perplexity.

Moreover, he did not feel that he could tell the king of Edna West, or even of Adam Codner. He must be more sure of several things first.

But he knew that he was not a spy at heart; that he had not come to harm Dareworld or its people.

"The truth is this," he answered. "We never heard of Dareworld. We never suspected the existence of such a place. We have no designs on the kingdom, no desire or plan to bring harm to it or its people.

"As for our remaining silent about having been at the mine, the reason is simple. We did not know what we had found, what this community was like. Because the outside world did not know anything of gold in this country we knew the mine was being kept secret. We did not know what our discovery of it might mean. We simply thought it better to play safe; to keep quiet until we understood the situation better.

"What we really expected to find was a group of men only—men who would be desperate, who would act quickly if they

knew their secret had been discovered. We had no idea that we would find what we did—a happy, prosperous people."

"I believe you, my boy," said the king quickly. "I believe you, and I know I can trust both of you. I am satisfied on that point. Now, in view of what has happened here to-night, there are several things of which I must tell you.

"In the first place, rulers of Dareworld have always been men. Always there has been a male heir until the queen died when Helen was a little girl. There is no reference in the constitution to the matter, but, because we have always had kings, it was assumed that we always would; that Acton would succeed me to the throne. I was content to permit this impression.

"But for the last two or three years I have been worrying. Frankly, I am not satisfied that Acton will make a good ruler. Rather, I am sure that he will not. He is not serious enough. He does not do his share of the work. He is always talking of livelier times, of sports, more dances, things of that sort. He has even criticized our methods, the very things which have insured our prosperity, which have made our people contented.

"In the brief time I have been in this room a plan has occurred to me. I am going to do this. I am going before the people and tell them why I do not wish to have Acton succeed me. I am going to point out that there is nothing which will prevent Helen taking the throne upon my death. And I am going to tell them that, with Helen as queen, with you as the queen's consort, prosperity and contentment are assured to the people of Dareworld."

Ross stared in amazement at the king, believing for the moment that his majesty had lost his reason.

"Do not be surprised, my boy," said King Hubert quickly. "I have not lost my sense of proportion up here in this isolated place. I know we are an infinitesimal part of the great world. I know that I am King of Dareworld only because an ancestor happened to find this place and establish this kingdom. I am perfectly aware that, since Dareworld was founded, there has been a great change in the outside world; that in the most advanced countries kings and emperors are such in name only; that the people rule themselves.

"I can't tell you now all that I have thought, partly planned. Nor would it be fair to you to permit you to believe that I am sure of success in making you the future King of Dareworld. That must depend upon circumstances which I cannot explain to you now, upon the outcome of certain hopes and fears which I alone hold. Events may be very different, may follow the lines I had in mind when you breakfasted with me.

"But I can say now," and the king leaned forward pleadingly, "that I will need you in any outcome, boy—need your advice and your aid."

"You can have it, what little I can give," responded Ross quickly.

"And Helen," continued the king. "You will not ask her to leave with you?"

"I did ask that, but she refused—refused to leave you."

"And that of which I have just spoken?"

Ross hesitated. He was in love, dazzled by love. For the moment the thought of life there in the happy community with the Princess Helen intoxicated him. But he was blessed with much good sense and with a head that cleared quickly.

"Your majesty," he began, "I do not know what to say. The prospect is alluring, but, somehow, I cannot accept it, not now at least. I have always lived in a free country. My ancestors helped make it free. I have been brought up with a dislike for all things which savor of kings and emperors. It would be hard for me to be the subject of a king, and it would be impossible for me to become the ruler of a kingdom.

"But this is all so unexpected. I don't know. There is much to be thought of, much to be discussed. Why not leave it open now, open with the understanding that we are to make no attempt to escape; that we will remain in Dareworld, prisoners or guests, until a decision has been reached?"

"Right, my boy, right!" cried the king as he sprang to his feet. "Remain here to-

night, and to-morrow you will be free; will again become our guests. Forgive me for this, but you understand how it was. Adam Codner is one of our leaders, perhaps our most able citizen. I could not but act upon his advice."

"I understand perfectly," answered Ross. "And, sir, I hope to be able to serve you better than you know."

His majesty looked at him quickly, started to speak, and then turned toward the door. Before he reached it, however, he stopped, stared at the floor a moment, and then glanced up at Ross.

"I think I know what you mean," he said slowly. "You have probably felt what has long troubled me, an undercurrent of dissatisfaction. It is not revolutionary, not criminal. It is of importance only as the happiness of a people is of importance to their ruler.

"Prince Acton best represents it in his desire for more life, more sport in Dareworld. You can help me greatly by supplying that which I cannot. I say this only that you will not misunderstand, will not think that your loyalty to me demands that you join the elders of our community. I should, indeed, consider it a favor if you would go about with the prince and his friends and show them how to obtain those things which they feel are lacking."

Without waiting for Ross's answer he opened the door and stepped out, only to stop in surprise when he found the princess in the corridor.

"Why, Helen!" he cried. "I thought you had gone home long ago. How unwise!"

"But I wanted to walk home with you, father," explained the girl readily. "Had any one come I would merely have said that you were inside and I was waiting for you."

As a matter of fact, Helen had intended to return to the palace when she left her father and Ross. But at the door she had found Edna West fumbling with the latch. Edna's frightened face and the great bundle at her feet were self explanatory.

"You, too!" exclaimed the princess before she realized what her words might imply. "Were you coming to save them?"

Helen's admission was the one thing needed to break down Edna's reserve.

"Yes," she cried defiantly, "and I would be a pretty poor sport if I didn't risk something to save the man who traveled across the barren grounds to find me."

"To find you."

Helen, her world reeling about her head, could only echo the words.

"Yes. He knew me in New York, and tried to make me like him then. But I was a little fool. I didn't know a real man when I saw one. But Arley Carr isn't the man to let a thing like that stop him when he knew I was in danger."

"Arley Carr!" repeated Helen. "I thought—"

"You thought I meant the other," interrupted Edna. "No, but I know how it is. I knew this afternoon when we were at tea together. I knew it was you that first night at the ball when I tried to warn them to go away when there was time."

As Edna spoke Helen's mind had been working rapidly. The old danger had suggested many things, a mystery about Edna that no one in Dareworld knew.

"Tell me about it," she whispered. "You can trust me. We believed you came to us just as others have come, because for some reason you wished to leave your world; because you believed you could find happiness here."

"But you knew," countered Edna, "what I was brought for. You knew that Prince Acton wanted a wife."

"Yes, but we only hoped that in a girl from the outside the prince would find happiness, would be content to give up his wild schemes and settle down. Has any one tried to force you? Why didn't you tell father or me?"

"I guess you wouldn't have told any one with that awful old man threatening to kill you if you ever peeped how you had been stolen."

The girl shuddered as the face of Adam Codner rose before her. Her fear was so evident that Helen drew her closer in quick sympathy.

"Tell me," she demanded. "I will promise not to repeat it. And I can give you the aid you need."

Encouraged by this sympathy and assurance, Edna gave a brief account of her abduction in New York, her trip to Dareworld, the threats of Codner, and her relief and consternation upon the appearance of Arley and Ross.

"And after that," she demanded; "after a man had frozen and starved and suffered to save a girl who had never even treated him decently, and after he had started off on a trip like that with such a bare chance of finding her, don't you think the least the girl could do would be to help him get away from that old man's clutches?"

For a moment Helen did not speak. Many things had been made plain to her. She now understood the cause of the hatred of Adam Codner, and she knew, too, with what a wily enemy she had to deal.

"I want you to tell me," she said at last, "that I can go to father with your story. Never has such a crime been committed in Dareworld. And father will see that you leave safely with the men who came for you."

"No!" cried Edna in quick alarm. "Not while that old man is free. He will do as he says. That is why he had me live in his house. Neither Arley nor Mr. Burton nor I would get out alive. I've told you because you found me here and you would know how it was. But you must not, you cannot tell."

Edna's terror was so evident that Helen had to soothe her with a promise to keep her secret.

"For a time," she conceded. "We will just plan among the four of us. But the wrong will be righted. Dareworld will not keep you. And now run home. Father is with Ross and Arley, and if he is not to know he must not find you here. I will wait and keep him until you have time to reach your home."

CHAPTER X.

THE CARTRIDGE.

THE following morning King Hubert himself went to the prison and opened the doors, thereby reconverting Dareworld's prisoners into the hidden kingdom's guests. He led Ross and Arley at once to the palace, where the Princess Helen met them at the breakfast table.

"I have sent for Adam Codner," said his majesty when they were seated, "to tell him what I have done. He should be here any moment."

Because there was daylight in Dareworld only for a short time in the middle of the day, no one had seen the men leave the prison. Consequently, when there was a knock at the door a few minutes later, and Adam Codner entered, the old man stared in amazement.

"Your majesty!" he finally protested. "After what I have told you! When you know what these men are!"

"Sit down, Adam," replied the king calmly. "I have investigated this case to a certain extent, so far as was possible last night, and I find that we acted too rashly. There is not sufficient evidence against these two men, and until something more conclusive is brought forth I do not feel justified in detaining them in prison. I have reestablished them as our honored guests, and as such they will remain until we know definitely that your charges are correct."

Codner's face was distorted by hate and chagrin. He strode forward to the table, his hands clenched, his lips working.

"Adam," continued his majesty, "I wish you would attempt to control yourself. I realize that only your zeal for the welfare of Dareworld has prompted your action, but I believe that it has carried you too far. I, as the legal ruler of this kingdom, now state that I will be wholly responsible for our guests, for their conduct while here, and for their remaining here."

"But how can you be?" snarled Codner. "They are only pulling the wool over your eyes. They are only attempting to ingratiate themselves with you, and then, at the first opportunity, they will leave. And you know what that means."

"They will not leave," answered the king simply. "I am assured of that. They have already had an opportunity to do so, but they scorned it. And I have their word that they will make no attempt to depart."

"Their word!" shrieked the old man. "What is their word? They came here as spies, and as spies they will leave. They came here plotting to disrupt Dareworld, to bring ruin to our happy people. They find it easy to deceive you, and they could ask nothing better. They are making you their tool, the instrument whereby they will expose us to the world, scatter Dareworld to the four winds."

"Adam," interrupted the king sternly, "I have heard enough. Leave this room. You have forgotten yourself, and only your long record saves you from a just reprimand. Go, and when you have some evidence supporting your charges, something that will make me believe that what you say is true, come to me at once. In the mean time, I do not wish to hear anything more from you."

"But that cartridge in the bunk house at the mine!" shouted Codner. "They saw it; saw it all; know our secret. They came on to Dare City hoping to learn more. They said nothing about their discovery. They told only a story of being lost, starving. They thought we would believe, that we would welcome them, and then, at the first opportunity, they planned to run away with the knowledge they had stolen. I will not let them make a dupe of you."

"Adam," and the king arose, his face white, his eyes blazing, his voice quivering, "leave this room immediately. Do not come again in connection with this matter until you have the proof I have demanded."

Codner, shivering with passion, glared at Ross and Arley and then turned abruptly and went out.

"Father," said the Princess Helen, "can you not see how he hates them. He is only trying to make you and Dareworld pay his grudges."

"It is only his zeal for our kingdom," answered his majesty. "He will be less bitter when he thinks it over. Let us forget it and speak of something else."

The king turned the conversation to another subject and then deftly brought both Ross and Arley into it with questions as to certain things in the outside world. He seemed to have forgotten Codner and the scene he had made, and in a few moments Ross and Arley ceased to think of it. Both men found their admiration for the gentle monarch increasing, while Ross felt a growing affection for him.

The Princess Helen, however, was silent and depressed. Despite her father's attempts to draw her out, to enspirit her, she continued in a mood that was nothing less than despondent. At last she broke into the conversation.

"Father," she demanded, "will you not admit the danger to Ross? Adam Codner hates Ross and Mr. Carr—hates them as I never knew a man could hate. Won't you see that there is something more than a zealous regard for the prosperity of Dareworld in his attitude?"

The king did not answer for a moment, and in the silence that followed the princess's words, Ross seriously considered telling his majesty what he and Arley knew of Codner. He realized that the king's faith in the old man was still as great as ever, and that the same objection would be made to his charges as had been made to Codner's. He was inclined to risk even that, to make known his suspicions, and then try to get the facts, when Prince Acton entered the room.

"Fine!" he cried, as he saw Ross and Arley. "Fine! Uncle, I'm glad you reversed your decision. Codner is getting old and seeing things. Gentlemen, let me congratulate you."

He shook hands cordially and then begged of the princess a place at the table.

"Domesticity is Helen's middle name," he announced as he sat down. "I'm always sure of a bite to eat at her table."

Ross glanced up quickly at this use of a phrase which, he felt certain, had been brought to Dareworld by Edna West. Immediately he fell to speculating as to Prince Acton's part in the undercurrent of events in Dareworld.

Because of the proposition made in their bedroom the previous afternoon, Ross did not believe that the prince knew anything of Codner's activities. He recognized in the prince's offer a decision on the young man't part to break away from the hidden kingdom, to get out into the world and see

the things of which he had dreamed, to participate in the gay life which he evidently believed was all there was to New York.

Ross considered this merely a harmless, individual intrigue. He felt that the prince had no desire to harm Dareworld, wanted only to get away from it. He did not think seriously of this opportunity to escape. He had given his word that he would not, and he was now bound by other ties.

Ross now knew, in fact, that he would never leave Dareworld unless it were in the company of the Princess Helen, and he became impatient to get at the bottom of Codner's scheme. Whatever it was, he was certain, from what little he knew, that there was a conspiracy against the king if not against Dareworld itself.

Prince Acton immediately took charge of the conversation and there was no return to the subject which had dominated at the beginning of the meal. And that the prince had an object in coming was shown immediately when they had finished.

"I'm going to show Mr. Carr our city," he said as he arose. "I will leave Mr. Burton to you."

He linked his arm in Arley's and went out of the room.

"I am afraid that I must leave you to your own resources for a time," his majesty said to Ross. "I have duties to attend to now, and Helen, I am afraid, will be busy for a time. But wander about the palace or in the city as you please. I am sure you will be received courteously wherever you go, and in a few hours I will be at liberty again."

The king went out, leaving Ross and the princess together.

"Dearest," he whispered, "I would stay here in Dareworld forever if I could be with you."

At once she was at his side and his arms were around her.

"But listen," she whispered as she tore herself free. "We must think of something else now. There is danger for you, and for all of us, I feel certain. There is something that my father never even suspects, and we, dearest, you and I, must save him and save Dareworld. When that is done we can talk of ourselves."

"But we needn't stop loving each other because of it," protested Ross as he again held out his arms. "My princess, come. Let me only hold your little finger. I must. I can't believe it is true otherwise."

She darted forward, kissed him, and was away again before he could hold her.

"There," she said. "Now you know. But there is something I want to tell you. When I left the prison last night I found Edna West at the door, and she had come as I had, with equipment for your escape."

Ross started but did not speak.

"She told me everything," continued Helen. "She told me why you came to Dareworld, and she told me how she came."

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.

DAWN ON THE RIVER

BY CLINTON SCOLLARD

THE panting ferry's wheezy scream
Answers the tugboat's shrill drawn cry;
Pillars of smoke and clouds of steam
Drift up the pallid sky.

A sudden sunrise splendor smiles
Where shone faint streaks of pearl and fawn;
And all the grisly granite piles
Are etched upon the dawn.

Nothin' But Privacy

by Robert Shannon

CURLY McGUIRE, leaning his hulking form against the door of the Fair Play Garage, caught sight of Policeman Ham Hardy approaching. An instinctive dislike for dignitaries of the law brought a scowl to his gross face.

"Howdy, Curly," said the officer genially, stopping for the ostensible purpose of lighting a cob pipe. "Goin' to stop off in town with us for a while?"

Curly pushed his wide black hat to the back of his head with a lazy swagger.

"Me?" he demanded, contemptuously. "Me, stop off here in Sweet Rose, Oklahoma? I stay here till I get ready to leave —but believe me, this whistlin'-station is the last place on the map I'd stay for long."

The policeman struck another match. "I didn't know but what you might be leavin', Curly," he said between puffs, "seein' as there is a stranger here askin' about you."

"Who's lookin' for me?" he demanded.

"I don't know who he is," Hardy said casually, "except that I overheard him askin' where you was stoppin'."

Curly frowned viciously. "Listen, old-timer," he said, "the next time you hear anybody that wants to know anything about Curly McGuire, you just send 'em around to Curly McGuire himself for information. Who was he askin'?"

"He was askin'," said the other, significantly, "he was askin' the chief of the police force."

Curly yawned. "If you see that bird again, send him to me personally," he said, "and tell your chief of police not to talk about me behind my back or I'l come around and twist one of his ears off!"

When policeman Hardy had strolled on, Curly gazed with bored eyes up and down the wide, dusty streets that led, at either end, out into the flat oil lands, where derricks rose like church spires in all directions. There were few people about, it being mid-afternoon, and the sojourner in the town was lonesome.

The empty chairs plainly visible in the lobby of the Commercial House across the way lured him over. Joe Burdick, reading a magazine behind his cigar counter, glanced up as Curly entered, and beckoned to him.

"There's a fellow stoppin' here been askin' about you, Curly," he said confidentially. "Name's Winkler. I looked him up on the register. Chicago man."

"Where is this here guy?" Curly asked slowly, a threatening note in his voice. A couple of thick fingers toyed with the heavy gold watch chain that hung in a long curve from his top vest button to the lower left hand pocket.

"He's out now," the cigar man said in a hushed voice. "He just asked if you was in town, and I told him yes."

Curly gave a hitch to some heavy object that was suspended from his belt under the right tail of his coat.

"Well, you tell him the next time you see him that when somebody takes him by

the nose and pulls him up out of his chair, he'll know it's Curly McGuire. You better watch your own step, too, my lad, talkin' about me to strangers."

He turned abruptly away from the counter and strode across the lobby with a swinging gait that carried him down to the Casiene Lunch Room and up, by way of the back stairs, to the long bar in the big room where spirits were to be had in defiance of the statutes.

"There was a feller in here, Curly—" the bartender began, as he set out the dark bottle and small glass.

Curly snarled.

"Yeah—I know. Askin' about me. Seems like I'm rather popular 'round here."

There was a gulp and another libation was poured.

"Looked like one of them there smooth dicks from the Hart Detective Agency," the bartender remarked as he plied his towel along the damp surface of the bar.

Curly shot him a hostile glare.

"Say, bo," he growled, leaning forward across the bar, "can that kind of talk. There's no dick lookin' for me. It's a mistake, see?"

"No hard feelin's, Curly," said the bartender, affably.

"They's none of these birds got anything on me," Curly continued. "My business is my business and I keep it to myself. They been tryin' to get somethin' on Curly McGuire, but he's got too much brains for 'em, that's all. Get me?"

He turned from the bar in disgust. A poker game going on in the corner attracted his attention. He took fifteen dollars' worth of chips and won the first jackpot, amounting to a profit of something more than twenty dollars. Immediately he cashed in.

"What's the matter, don't you like the game, Curly?" the banker asked.

"Always quit when I'm ahead, see?" the transient replied as he tucked the bills into his vest pocket. "When I play I don't lose. Go on ahead and take your money away from the suckers. Me? Any time I stick my feet under your table I'm a dead loss to you. I'm lettin' you off cheap. If I get broke I'll come back and skin you out of your roll."

Somehow he found himself wandering in the direction of the hotel. As he strolled past he saw Joe Burdick in conversation with a thin, somewhat dapper man, who was thoughtfully puffing a cigar and who was, apparently, doing more listening than talking.

Curly stopped and peered in at the window. Joe, having a good listener, was talking with abandon. Occasionally the stranger would ask a question and such interruptions seemed to spur the cigar man to even greater fluency. Although not naturally a sensitive man, Curly's perception told him that he was the subject of the discussion. And he did not like it. If he must be talked about he preferred to do it himself.

Curly McGuire had, in common with most bad men, that trait of character which impels them, when danger threatens, to plunge into it. Not that in this case Curly feared anything. He felt his record was clear, yet he was irritated, almost apprehensive. His was a nature that could not stand a great deal of suspense.

"He's comin' in here now," Burdick said, as he saw Curly moving toward the door. "Look out, he's a bad egg—a bad one!"

The stranger selected a pack of chewing gum from a rack on the showcase and tossed a nickel on the counter. He picked up a magazine and began turning the pages abstractly.

Curly sauntered up to the stand and eyed him, but the other apparently didn't notice him.

"Joe, you was speakin' to me about an inquisitive visitor what's been inquirin' about me," Curly said slowly.

"Why yes, Curly—" Joe was a bit confused.

"Well, if you see that bird around here again you just tell him that I'll see him." The bad man eyed Joe's customer with a sinister stare. "Tell him I'll call on him. I'll call on him to-morrow mornin' and have a private conversation."

"About what time should I tell him you'll call?" Joe asked.

"Tell him I'll see him about after eleven o'clock—after I get my bath and shave. I'm a late sleeper and I don't get up early to see anybody. The only time I'm up

before eleven is when I got to catch a train. You might tell this sucker, too, that I'm a gent what don't care much about people from Chicago. Get me?"

Joe was ingratiating. "I sure do, Curly, and I'll tell him, sure thing."

After Curly had swaggered out the front door, Joe spoke again. "That's him," he said impressively.

"So I imagined," said the stranger.

"I wouldn't want him callin' on me—not in his state of mind," Joe ventured. "I think I'd leave town before there was any trouble. Of course, you do as you like."

"I'll take this magazine," his customer said casually. "And if anyone asks my room number you might tell them that I'm in twenty-four. I'll be there until noon tomorrow, at least."

The door of room number twenty-four was slightly ajar all of the next morning. At a few minutes before eleven o'clock it was given a push from the outside and it swung wide open. The occupant, who had been brushing his hair before a rickety dresser gave a startled look.

He was a man of meek appearance. His face was rather pale and he had an expression that was almost kindly.

His garb was unmistakably that of a city man. A dark suit fitted perfectly his slender form and his neckwear was quietly elegant. Curly, as he stood imposingly in the open doorway, noticed that his hands were white and narrow.

"My name's Curly McGuire!" It was a savage threat. The stranger looked up in a startled manner that seemed to exude timidity.

"McGuire, oh yes, yes—"

"Yes, Curly McGuire. Now, what do you want out of me? I'm here now. What is it—come clean?"

He entered the room, leaned against the dresser, crossed his arms and his feet and threw his head back defiantly. The other pushed out a battered chair.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. McGuire?" he invited nervously.

"Cut that—cut the Mr. McGuire stuff. I'm plain Curly McGuire, rough, woolly, hard to curry, Curly McGuire. Sure, I'll set down."

He dropped his bulk into the chair and crossed his legs. "What's your name?" he demanded.

"Winkler, Walter Winkler," was the reply. "I'm—I'm a detective." He sat on the edge of the bed.

Curly sized him up and down with withering scorn in his eyes.

"So, you're a dick, are you? Been askin' around town about me, eh? Want some dope on me, I suppose. Well, I'll give it to you—all you want of it. What is it you want to know?"

"Why, I wanted—" Winkler hesitated.

"Listen, pal," Curly said. "I know. You want to hook me up with some of these jobs what's been pulled off around here."

Curly, whose eyes were fishy blue, and somewhat bulging, fixed the detective with his most terrifying stare.

Winkler smiled feebly. "I came down here, of course—"

"You come from where?" Curly asked. "From Chicago, eh?"

"Yes."

"From the Hart Detective Agency?"

"Yes."

"On that Okmulgee bank case?"

"Yes."

"Lookin' for information, ain't you?"

"That's my business." The detective spoke as though he were defending himself.

"I thought so." Curly leaned forward in his chair with both hands on his knees. He might have been preparing to spring at Winkler's throat. "Well, you're goin' to get all the information you want, pal—in private."

He rose leisurely and banged the door shut, and twisted the key. "Just to make sure nobody comes in and disturbs us," he said, "seein' as this is just a confidential session. Now, just about what was it you wanted to know about me?"

Winkler ran his slender fingers through his hair and compressed his lower lip.

"Aw, don't be afraid to speak right up," Curly urged confidently, as he hooked one thumb in the sleeve hole of his vest. "This is private. I'll talk, right free this way. You see I know the law, backward. You can't do nothin' to me unless you can prove somethin' on me. Am I right?"

The detective nodded.

"You bet your life I'm right. I'll tell you anything, but it won't do you no good. What a man tells in private won't stand in court, without witnesses. You know that."

"I see you know the law pretty well," Winkler said admiringly.

"You bet I do. You can swear out a warrant for me for murder or highway robbery or larceny or anything and what good is it unless you can prove it?"

"Absolutely worthless."

"Correct. That what they write on a warrant, that's nothin' without evidence, is it?"

"You're right."

"You said somethin' then, partner," Curly was melting a bit under the warm appreciation of his legal knowledge. He took a few lengthy steps along the room, swung about, and brought up directly facing Winkler.

"You want to know about that Okmulgee robbery, do you?" he asked again. "Well, I done it—me, Curly McGuire. It was a one-man job. Now, what you goin' to do about it?"

The detective considered for a moment. "Why, I don't know what I can do, under the circumstances," he said.

Curly turned away and swaggered to the dresser. 'You can't do nothin'. Furthermore, I'll give you the details and they won't help you any." He snapped his fingers in derision at the representative of law and order.

"It was a neat job," Winkler remarked.

"Neat? Say, it was the cleanest, sweetest job that's been pulled in the state in ten years. It was duck soup for me. Listen, I gets the layout after two days in town. About two in the morning I busts open the back door of the place with a chisel, just like it was a cracker box. That safe! Say, I could have opened it with a button hook. One little shot of soup and the door flew off like it had been stuck on with glue."

Winkler marveled. "Well, for you, Curly, it might have been easy—"

"They're all easy for me," the bad man said, with professional pride. "Of course I don't know what kind you got up there in Chicago. I don't know nothin' about that kind of stuff, but I can pop any of 'em they got in Oklahoma." He glared at the detective as though he challenged him to deny the statement.

"I don't mean in Tulsa or Oklahoma City, understand," he qualified. "I mean out in the state."

'I don't doubt it."

"You know what I done after that? I stuffed the dough in my kick and got out the back way in time to mingle with the crowd around front. When I saw the president of the bank come down I beat it out to his house and went in the front door. He'd left his diamond stud on his dresser and I pinched that. Worth one thousand bucks—that's all!"

Curly pulled a chair up near Winkler, leaned on the back of it confidentially and gave a knowing wink.

"I'm goin' to tell you somethin' else I pulled that night. I slipped a handkerchief over my face and stuck up Mike Malloy's blind tiger. There was twelve in there drinkin' and I nicked the gang for three hundred and twenty-five dollars. Just a little small change, see?"

The detective clasped his hands around his knee, and leaned back on the bed.

"Heavens, McGuire, you're a better man than I ever imagined. I didn't know what they were sending me up against down here." There was reverence and awe in his tone.

Curly lifted one heavy hand, almost modestly.

"You ain't heard nothin' yet. Wait, I don't play all this small time stuff. I step into Tulsa once in a while. You heard about the lone bandit that went through three Pullman cars on the 'Frisco when the train was standin' in the yards about three months ago?"

Winkler was amazed. "You don't mean—"

"I mean I done it myself, alone—me, Curly McGuire. I work alone, all the time. That's why they never got me yet, and that's why they never will. You think I'd work with anyone else? Not me."

"You're a darn smart man—"

"Nix, nix—don't try to hand me any of that soft stuff. I know you birds. But I'm

tellin' you, under cover, some things that nobody knows. You know what I done after stickin' up that train. I went out and held up two street cars—two of 'em in forty minutes, the same night. Just a little narrow-gauge stuff, for fun."

Winkler looked at Curly covetously. "Man, alive, Curly! If I could only land you I'd make a reputation for myself that would—"

Curly growled ominously.

"Lay off that kind of talk," he ordered. "They's nobody goin' to land me. Get that foolishness out of your head. You're a nice little feller, but you're liable to get hurt if you get fresh, see?

"Anyway, there's a law in this country. Yes, you can get me pinched, but what of it? You can't stick me. The only way they'll ever get me is when I confess, and I'm not that kind."

He pushed the chair aside and dropped down on the bed beside the detective.

"I want to ask you sometin' you," he said. "You think my name's McGuire, don't you?"

"Why, yes, isn't it?"

Curly snorted.

"That shows how much you dicks know. I'm not a one-state guy, either. I didn't come from this here state of Oklahoma. I'm from Michigan and my name's Robinson.

"It's a big state and there is ten thousand Robinsons up there. You can't identify me. The last time I visited the folks I told 'em I was in the minin' business and before I left I stuck up the cashier of a certain factory and took the whole pay roll off him. Up there, they're still wonderin' who done it."

"It seems to me I heard about a job like that," Whistler said.

"Heard about it? The whole state heard about it. I had a notion to send in my picture to the newspapers just to show 'em what a regular guy looks like. I don't suppose you know I'm the lad that blew the Farmers' National Bank at Hastings, Nebraska, either, do you? I done that job, too.

"Yes, and I'll tell you somethin' else I done. I walked into a hotel in Kansas City durin' the jewelers' convention and lifted a four-carat rock right out of the president's tie. When he squawked I was the bird that got the hotel detective for him. Oh, I'm right there on this light-fingered stuff, too."

The detective was impressed and he did not fail to show it. "It's a real pleasure to meet a man like you," he said. "Won't you have a smoke?"

He extended his cigar case. Curly took one, lighted it and flicked the match over onto the dresser scarf.

"Ever hear about them taxicab drivers up in Kansas City that slug all the oil men? I went down to the hotel one night and had a few drinks and they spotted me for a boob, the suckers. They got me out in a machine, three of 'em. When we got out in the country I pulled a gat and took about four hundred dollars off 'em. I made 'em get out and I drove the car back to town myself. A bird stopped me, thinkin' I was a chauffeur, and wanted me to take him to the station to catch a train. He only had sixty dollars and a gold watch—but I got it!"

"Keeps you pretty busy, doesn't it?" Winkler asked curiously.

"Oh, I don't know. In the last three months I only done six bank jobs. One at Cushing, another at Oilfield, two in Shamrock, one in Pawhuska and the last one over in Arkansas at Mountain Home. That's not countin' any of the small stuff. I'm the guy that stuck up the Red Lion gamblin' house at Drumright. But that ain't a crime to rob a gamblin' house, is it?"

"I don't think it it, according to law, when the gambling house is operating illegally in defiance of the law."

"You don't think? I know. It ain't. I looked that little matter up. I got a lawyer friend, see. I tells him nothin', only ask him questions and he answers 'em. You know, I'd be a damn smart lawyer myself if I ever took up that game. I got a mind for law. I like it. You know, I could sue you if I wanted to."

The detective was astonished. "How could you sue me?"

Curly got up and stretched himself with the evident enjoyment only a large man can show when he extends his arms, one after the other.

"Why, I could sue you for comin' into this town and askin' about me. Everybody knows you are a detective. It looks bad for me. Accordin' to law I'm an innocent man. I been arrested, yes, lots of times, but they never convicted me. Them arrests ain't a thing in the world against my character. In the eyes of the law I'm as respectable as any gink in town—better than most of 'em.

"What I ought to do to you is to knock your block off. You come around askin' people about me, and they think maybe you got somethin' on me, when you ain't."

The detective seemed to tremble a trifle. "No hard feelings, I hope," he said.

"No, I got pity on you. You got a dirty, sneakin' job and you ought to be ashamed of yourself. Now I've told you all you wanted to know. You heard enough stuff to send me up for my natural life, but you can't prove a word of it and you know it.

"Now, you just beat it on back to Chicago and tell your boss to quit sendin' men down here after me. Leave us law-abidin', peaceable people alone. I'm lettin' you go, but the next dick that speaks to me—the very next one, I'm goin' to gouge his right eye out."

Curly turned his back fearlessly and strode to the door.

"And just to make sure you didn't frame up on me, you'd better lift up one end of that bed. If there's anybody under there I'm goin' to make him eat some lead. I'm not pullin' any gun but I will. Lift it up!"

Winkler smiled. "Why, certainly, Curly," he said, blandly. It was a bit heavy, but he hoisted it high enough for the bandit to see there was no one beneath it.

"Alright," said Curly. "Now you'd better get out of town."

"I'm going to-morrow."

"Yes, and I'll be here to see that you do. Don't forget that."

Curly was in high fettle. He had satisfied a vague desire to confess to someone and had done it in such a way that he felt that he had nothing to fear. That it happened to be his good fortune to have told his bad record to a helpless detective amused him, and he was flattered by the officer's deferential manner. For a moment Curly loitered in the door. Winkler provided the opportunity for him to prolong his stay.

"It's just about noon, Curly," he said. "Won't you stay and have lunch with me?"

Robin Hood came to a full halt.

"I was thinkin' you might make some crack like that," he said genially. "In fact, I was hopin' you would. Sure, I'll stick. Nobody ever accused me of bein' stuck up. But this ain't lunch for me—it's a dinner, because I'm a heavy eater and I don't take no light meals. And privacy is my whole name."

"I suppose the dining-room is open by now," Winkler said, looking at his watch.

"Nix on the dinin' room," Curly said with authority. "This is goin' to be a little private party, just us two with no strangers around to listen at us. Watch, I'll show you how to get some service around this dump."

He stepped out into the narrow hall where the stairs from the lobby below terminated. The sound of rattling dishes in the dining-room came up and there was a shuffling of feet as the guests were entering.

Curly placed his flat palm beside his mouth to give his voice carrying power.

"Hey, waiter!" he bawled, in a voice that startled the clerk and most of the guests.

"How's that?" the clerk called, coming from behind the register and looking up the stairway.

Curly recognized the voice.

"Not you, you pen pusher," he roared. "Send me up a waiter. Don't send up a gal waiter, either. Send me up a bar waiter, see? Now, don't keep me waitin' or I'll come down and leave my mark on you."

Curly's standing in the hotel, evidently, was of the highest.

"Coming right up, Mr. McGuire," was the obsequious reply.

"That's the way to get service," Curly explained, as he returned to the room. "You got to handle people to make 'em respect you. Now, take a fellow like you—you're too easy."

Winkler smiled apologetically. "I suppose I was just born easy. I can't help it."

Curly smiled tolerantly. "You watch

me," he said. "Maybe, you can pick up a few pointers. You see, I've been around quite a bit in my day."

The waiter who appeared at the door was very small and very bald, and he wore a full length apron that was looped over his neck, butcher fashion.

"What'll it be gents?" he asked sycophantically.

Curly looked at him curiously.

"What are you," he asked, "a waiter or a butcher?"

The man shifted the napkin he carried over his arm, as a badge of his calling.

"Waiter, sir."

"Well, you look more like a meat cutter with that apron. Now get this order. We want a couple of steaks—"

"What kind of steaks will it be, gents?"

"The best you got," Curly boomed, "None of this here thin, tough horsehide you call sirloin. Make 'em thick and juicy—the kind that the packin'-house boys eat themselves; not the kind the butchers eat. Tell that cook down there that we want 'em broiled nice and brown, but red inside—you know, so the blood follows the knife. We're a couple of wise birds and we got to have the real thing, see?"

There was a worried look on the waiter's face. "I'll tell the cook," he said. "And what else was it, gents?"

Winkler cleared his throat. "I'll have a—"

"Nix, nix," Curly objected. "Let me handle this job. It's an art to order a meal and I know how. Bring along a platter of French fried potatoes and you might bring up a couple of sides of boiled cabbage. Stew us some onions, too. What kind of pie you got?"

"We have custard—"

"Bring up a couple of 'em—and some spoons. And a can of cove oysters."

He turned to Winkler, thoughtfully. "What was it you was goin' to order a minute ago?" he asked. "You'll have to excuse me—I wanted to get the main part of it off my chest—"

The detective shook his head. "I guess you ordered enough," he remarked.

"That'll be all, gents?" The waiter paused with hand on the door knob.

"All?" Curly demanded angrily. "All? Cut out that twelve o'clock closin' stuff. We're goin' to have some drinks."

The servitor wagged his head, sorrowfully. He was a man who had spent many years of his life carrying drinks to tables in the old days.

"If I could I would," he explained, "but we ain't allowed to. I'll admit, gents, it's hell—but this here prohibition, we got it."

Curly gazed at him with what he hoped was a hypnotic eye, and advanced stealthily upon the shrinking figure in the doorway. Grasping him by the coat lapels that protruded above the apron, he bent his face down and spoke in low, venomous tones.

"I'm Curly McGuire and I drink when I feel like it. Furthermore, I ain't got a taste to-day for any of this kerosene they call whisky. I'm thirstin' for a little swig of the grape—see? Just bring up a pint of champagne. If it was evenin' I'd order a quart, but a pint is plenty just now. Now, don't ask me where you can get it. It's around somewhere. You get it."

Whereupon he pivoted the waiter about, thrust him with firm pressure out of the room and closed the door.

"They know me around here," he told Winkler. "Wait!"

For fifteen minutes Curly entertained with personal reminiscences of the liquor he had drunk and the places in which he had drunk it. From time to time he digressed to recount the details of attendant encounters growing out of such occasions. The story of how he had once locked a Joplin, Missouri, bartender in the ice-box, donned the apron and conducted the place himself the whole afternoon, was cut short by the arrival of the waiter, bearing a tray of heaping dishes.

"I got it," he said happily. "I got it from John, the Greek, that runs the ice cream parlor. He's kept it on ice seven years, waitin' for his brother to come over from the old country. He didn't want to give it up, but I told him—" and he winked at Curly—"I told who wanted it."

The china wash bowl and the pitcher were removed from the stand and the meal was spread. That the steaks were far short of the perfection Curly had specified in his

order troubled him not at all. Nor did the soggy French friend potatoes take any of the edge off his appetite.

The tiny bottle of what was once cheap American champagne had lost its pop and sparkle years before but it was, in the sight and taste of the bandit, a beverage beyond compare. He ate and drank with as much vigor as he talked, and when Winkler found himself unable to finish his half of the meal, Curly helped him.

"Havin' been fed proper, I'm goin' to take you down and treat you to the finest cigar Joe Burdick carries in stock," he told his host, as they rose. They descended the stairs together, Curly pausing for a moment to speak to the rather foppish clerk. "That meal," he said, "goes on my friend's bill—not mine."

"And the wine?" the clerk asked cautiously.

"What wine?" Curly demanded. "Don't you know this is a prohibition state? You could be arrested for sellin' wine. If you're speakin' of that grape juice we had, don't charge it. A friend made me a present of it."

The fat face of Joe Burdick beamed at them as they came up to his stand. Joe had expected the detective to be battered up, at least.

"Smokin' somethin', gents?" he asked, sliding back the door of his case.

"The best you got," Curly announced grandly. "Got a Remo?"

Joe's stock was limited.

"We ain't got a Remo, Curly," he apologized, "but we got the Hawk and the Stephen Perry and the Hispaniola. And I got two Victorias left outen a box we got in only three months ago."

"Victorias!" Curly scoffed. "That's the shape of a cigar, not the name. Got a Lillian Belmont? Them's a good cigar—used to smoke 'em when I was a kid."

Joe shook his head regretfully. "All out—but I tell you what's a good cigar. It's the Indian Brave, straight Havana filler. It's a ten center."

"Set out the box." Curly picked out one, tested it for bouquet with a hearty sniff, bit off the end, and stuck it in his mouth. "Help yourself, Winkler."

The detective selected one and was about to light it when his nostrils caught a whiff of the smoke from Curly's cigar. "Don't believe I'll smoke it now," he said. "I'll save it until later." He slipped it into his inside pocket.

"Suit yourself, partner. Where's the dice? I'll shake you one hand of Indian dice for the whole bill, forty cents or nothin' first flop."

There was a brief interchange of the dice box. Joe threw three treys; Curly four sixes. "Nothin' to it," the winner said, emitting a fog of rank blue smoke. "All the best of everything for Curly McGuire for nothin'. Always was that way."

Winkler looked at his watch and mentioned that he thought he would take a stroll.

"I'll go with you," said Curly, affably. "In fact, it won't do my reputation no harm at all to be saw with a man of your standin'. Guess some people in this hick burg thought you was layin' out to pinch me—the poor fish. Come on."

They left the hotel and when they were on the sidewalk, Curly slipped his arm through Winkler's, just for the effect the friendly attitude would have on any chance observer. He fancied everyone must know why Winkler was in town, and he figured to be seen in public and on overly familiar terms with the Chicago detective would lend him an air of mysterious cleverness. People would know instantly that he had fooled the big town sleuth, and would wonder in amazement as to how he had done it. The thought was very pleasant.

Policeman Hardy met them, almost as though he had been waiting for them, before they had gone twenty steps.

"The chief wants to see you, Curly," he said easily. "Wanted me to bring you down."

Curly was humiliated and annoyed. "It's the way they have in these rube towns," he explained to the detective. "Always wantin' to see you, and never havin' any license to bother a man at all. Well, I'll go. You just come along, too, Mr. Winkler. This is goin' to be funny."

But the keen zest of passing in review down Main Street with Winkler was gone.

To be seen in company with the policeman and the detective and headed in the direction of the police station savored too much actual arrest to be pleasant. Nevertheless, he made a brave showing of airy nonchalance until they were into the chief's office.

The chief was a man of direct speech and action; a lank Westerner who, as a boy, had ridden the range in Texas.

"There ain't goin' to be any gun play in this here office, Curly," he explained, "principally, because Ham Hardy can draw about two whisks faster than any man now livin' in these parts. And he's got his instructions. We got you this time, Curly. You might not know it, but you confessed everything.'

Slowly, Curly removed his hat. A few straggly ringlets of hair seemed pasted by perspiration to his forehead.

"I just want to read you somethin'." The chief picked up a sheaf of papers. "We got material here for fourteen indictments. Listen: 'You want to know about that Okmulgee robbery, do you? Well, I done it —me, Curly McGuire. It was a one-man job. Now, what you goin' to do about it?' "

"And there is a whole lot more where that came from, Curly."

For the first time in his life someone was slipping the cold deck to Curly McGuire. He was getting it good and plenty and as the chief read him page after page of his own story, told in his own exact words, all that had been the original disposition of the uncaught bandit oozed out at every pore. Even his vast bulk seemed to shrink to moderate proportions, and his hand trembide as he wiped his brow with his red handkerchief.

"Who done this to me?" he asked, with a quaver in his voice as he looked from face to face. "Only a few minutes ago I said all this to Winkler, but it was strictly private. Who done this?"

"A little girl with curls down her back," said the chief. "She's a stenographer. Winkler planted a dictaphone in his room and we heard everything you said. The girl typed it down as you talked. And it's evidence that stands in court. You see, you're an old-fashioned bad man, Curly, and you been up against modern improvements."

Curly sagged. He tried to speak. "Dicta-dicta, come to think of it I've heard tell of them things," he wailed.

Winkler fished something out of his inside pocket. It was one Indian Brave cigar. "Think of me when you smoke it. It's rotten, but you can't even get that good where you're going."

Curly shook his head feebly. There was farewell and repudiation in his tone.

"Lemme alone," he said. "I don't want nothin'—nothin' but privacy."

And he got fifteen years of it.

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THE LITTLE SONGS YOU SANG

BY VIOLA BROTHERS SHORE

THE little songs you sang one night—your voice—your touch—
Your glance—
Pebbles thrown into the millpond of my life
By chance.
A ripple—and light circles faintly reaching
Toward the shore
And then the surface of the millpond placid
As before.
But far below, where peering eyes of sun-beams
Never dart
The little songs you sang lie softly, softly
On my heart.

The Moon Girl

by Katharine Metcalf Roof

Author of "And Never the Twain Shall Meet," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"MARKED BY THE MOON."

UNDER the elms on Professor May's lawn a garden-party was in progress. The month was June, dedicated to social testimonials of various kinds to the graduating class—although by no means confined to them.

Dr. Edward Preston, a young physician and a very recent arrival in Cambridge, sat on an iron garden seat elaborately wrought in a grapevine design, with pretty Aline Mathews, whose vivacious comments and explanations evidently amused him. He was a smooth-shaven young man with clean-cut features, a mouth that held its own counsel, and blue eyes, whose extreme keenness was masked by an expression of kindliness and humor.

"And who is the Poe-like young man?" he inquired, indicating a pale, dark youth with melancholy eyes who stood staring at a tall blond girl who was the center of a group of young men.

Aline glanced at the man and a curious expression passed over her face. "You rather struck it when you said Poe-like. That is Arthur Warren, and he has, I am afraid, some of the weaknesses of Poe without his gifts."

"What is he? What does he do?" pursued the young physician who seemed for some reason interested.

"Principally dance attendance upon Inez May," replied Aline. "But he is supposed to be taking some sort of a post-graduate course here. He has money. I always thought he saw Inez first and decided upon the post-graduate course afterward, but I may wrong him. Inez is supposed to have reformed him."

"Then she is seriously interested in him?" the young physician spoke quickly. Aline Mathews flashed an amused glance at him.

"Who would be rash enough to say that Inez was seriously interested in anything or any one," she said.

Preston's eyes reflected a faint passing expression. Aline speculated concerning the exact shade of meaning it represented. She was fully aware that the young doctor would not have been talking to her if Inez May had been available.

"I have only met Miss May once," he said. "It was very good of her to invite me this afternoon."

"Partly *post-mortem* courtesy, I suppose," said Aline, "not to flatter you too much. You represent the late Dr. Philbrick as well as the present Dr. Preston. You have fallen honorable heir to his cherry-trees and lilac bushes and calling list. In addition to that social inheritance—who is a more promising candidate for social popularity than a young, good-looking, unmarried physician—unless it be a young, good-looking, unmarried minister?"

"Spare my blushes," expostulated Preston laughing.

An opening in the groups at that mo-

ment left their young hostess fully in view. Preston's eyes rested upon the girl without betraying any feeling he might have.

She was a slender blonde girl with brows and lashes darkened by nature into the effect sought by the denizens of the theater. This contrast of dark lashes with blue eyes served to accentuate a peculiarity of the eyes that was very noticeable but not easily described. The pupils, without being small, were not large, and the iris had an effect that was almost like an illusion of light, a light that seemed to flicker and change under some inner influence. They were cold eyes. Had it not been for a certain sensuous sweetness about the lips, full, but not too full, it might have seemed a face of almost repellent coldness.

"Miss Inez does not look susceptible," said the doctor.

"Her eyes are supposed to be chilling," remarked Aline, covertly studying him.

Preston smiled faintly. "But the mouth is reassuring; and she has a charming smile. It is a face of curious suggestions and contradictions, not the face of the conventional young girl in a college town."

"Inez is conventional enough, so far as the outward virtues of the quality go," replied her friend. "I wonder sometimes what may be going on under the surface. She was a very queer child. You know they used to call her the Moon Girl."

"What an interesting name! How did she acquire it?" asked Preston.

"Why, when she was a child," Aline explained, "she used to run away regularly once a month. Esther, her old nurse, discovered that it always happened in the dark of the moon, as she called it. Esther used to read all sorts of queer things about the stars out of a funny old almanac—'Old Moore's,' or something of that sort, it was called—and she used to say that Inez was 'marked by the moon,' because Dr. May was writing his treatise on the past history of the moon before Inez was born, and divided his time between looking at the moon through his telescope and writing about it in his study."

Edward Preston looked thoughtful. "I am not sure that it is all nonsense," he said. "Rather a rash statement for a physician to make, perhaps, but every now and then you hear of a case like that—a moon runaway. And of course a certain effect of the moon upon the insane is recognized by many physicians."

Aline looked but faintly interested. Personal interpretations entertained her more than scientific speculation. "More probably it is an inheritance from her mother," she said. "Inez's mother was a Southern beauty and belle, but so wild and reckless that her parents could do nothing with her. They were nice, kind people, every one liked them, mother said, but they actually *had* to lock the girl in her room. One evening sober old Algernon May dined at their house and fell madly in love with her, and she married him off the bat. Mother always said that her parents were thankful to pass her on into his respectable hands, and that she married him to escape from home. Nobody knows what she would have done if she had lived, for he never tried to control her—but she died when Inez was born."

The doctor's eyes remained upon the subject of their conversation. "And does Miss Inez run away still?" he inquired lightly.

"Not exactly," laughed Aline, "but she has a habit of making sudden visits. Just decides to go away and goes—a sort of habit of taking French leave of her social responsibilities. But she always comes back. No one ever seems to think it curious. She has a certain divine-right-of-queens to her own way. People seem to think everything Inez does is right."

At that moment Inez caught the doctor's eye and came toward them. Preston rose. Inez looked up at him.

"You have been twosing quite long enough," she said. "The valedictorian has been glowering upon you for the last half hour. He's frightfully smitten with Aline, and I want to talk to you." She glanced at her friend. "Let Dicky come over here and sit with you, Aline, and give me a chance to talk with Dr. Preston."

Preston looked down at her with a smile. "I always like to believe that things like that are true," he answered. Inez beckoned to the valedictorian who hastened with alacrity to her side.

"You amuse Aline, Dicky, while I show Dr. Preston Aristides and the Queen of Sheba," she said.

"I didn't know that you were entertaining such celebrated guests," remarked Preston.

The girl looked at him with her flickering eyes. "They are permanent guests," she said. "They live in the flower-bed at the foot of the garden."

"Happy Aristides, fortunate Queen of Sheba!" exclaimed Preston. He walked beside her along the box-bordered path, aromatic in the afternoon sunshine. On both sides the roses were beginning to bloom. Inez paused to pick a very pale yellow bud half open.

"Isn't it a wonderful color?" she said. "Moon color. I call it the Moon Rose."

She held it out to him. "The Moon Rose—that would be a good name for you," said Preston.

She lifted it to his face. "Smell it," she said. He felt the light touch of the petal against his lips.

"Don't you want it?" she asked.

He caught her eyes and held them an instant. "Oh, is it for me?"

"If you want it." He took it from her, and this time her hand touched his an instant — not intentionally. He knew instinctively that the girl was not a coquette, and yet he fancied she was not unconscious of the brief contact. He fastened the rose in his buttonhole as he followed her down a narrow, deliberately curving path.

At the foot of the garden, flanking each side of an oval flower-bed of blue monkshood and orange marigold stood two weather-stained figures of stone a little less than life-size, naive in workmanship, quaintly charming.

Inez waved her hand. "Aristides—the Queen of Sheba. Consider yourself introduced."

Preston regarded them with delight. "You are sure they are not Adam and Eve?" he asked.

"I have always been brought up to believe them to be as represented," said Inez. He noted her elusive dimple and decided that she was more than charming. "Besides—their names are on the pedestal."

Preston bent for a closer inspection. "So they are. What a strangely assorted companionship. It's jolly for Aristides, but I should think the queen might be bored upon occasion."

"I dare say she bores him, too," remarked Inez, "with her reminiscences of Solomon."

"They look as if they had always been here," said Preston.

"They were brought from somewhere as ballast in a sailing ship," Inez explained. "My great grandfather took a fancy to Aristides, and I think they must have thrown in the queen."

Preston's eyes wandered over the sun and shade of the garden with a sudden keen sense of its peaceful beauty. Somewhere a robin began his evening song. The heavy fragrance from a syringa bush drifted out to them. The late sunlight lay in horizontal bars of golden green upon the grass, and a bee buzzed out of the heart of a rose.

"'And in the afternoon they came unto a land where it was always afternoon,'" said Preston. "You don't mind if I quote Tennyson? I am just home from France, you know, and all this seems like an incredible dream of peace and beauty." He looked down at her. "Don't you love it? Or do you sometimes get tired of its very perfection?"

The girl's eyes narrowing slightly met his without change of expression. "When I want a change I—take it," she said, and smiled.

CHAPTER II.

THE WHITE WINGS OF DESIRE.

"YOUR father is asking for you, Inez." Arthur Warren was standing in the path. His dark face seemed curiously pale in the warm sunshine. Again Preston thought of Edgar Allan Poe. There was a tragic, hungry look in his eyes as they dwelt upon the girl's face. "People are going and other people are coming," he added.

"And I am a careless hostess," concluded Inez lightly. "I must return to my post at once."

She turned to Preston, who seemed lost in contemplation of the afternoon garden. "Will you come with us? Or do you prefer Aristides and the queen?" she asked.

Preston looked around and started toward her. "No, I don't think I shall waste any feeling upon the queen. I'm afraid she's an unsusceptible sort"—he looked into her eyes—"even more unsusceptible than you," he concluded.

Warren had begun to walk slowly on in advance of them. "Am I unsusceptible?" she asked. "Why do you think that? Tell me. I love to talk about myself."

He met her laughing eyes. "There is never but one reason for being unsusceptible," he said. "One is interested either in some *one* or *something* else."

"Is it 'one' or 'thing' in my case?" she asked.

"I haven't found out yet," said Preston. "Give me time."

"As much as you like," responded Inez.

"Now I don't know just what you mean by that," said Preston.

The narrowness of the path still obliged them to walk in single file.

"This garden must be wonderful in the moonlight," said Preston. "It is," said Inez. "And to-night it is full moon."

"Is that an invitation?" laughed Preston.

Inez turned and looked and let her light glance travel over him.

"It is not," she said. "I have an engagement with Arthur—with Mr. Warren."

Warren turned at the sound of his name, his dark eyes quivering with some passionate suppressed emotion. It occurred to Preston that the boy was jealous. At that moment he caught sight of the yellow rose in Preston's butttonhole, and they grew dark as night. "Be careful, Othello," thought Preston. "It may be that the moon rose is not for your picking."

That evening the doctor left his spinster aunt, who kept his house, to her game of solitaire, and walked through the quieter streets of the old university town. Suddenly discovering the gleam of statuary among the shrubbery of a garden bordering on a side street, he realized that he was walking past Dr. May's house. He caught the glimmer of a woman's white dress among the trees, and heard a man's voice—low, broken, evidently urgent. Preston could not hear what he said. He was walking slowly, the moon was under a cloud, and he could only see the figures among the shrubbery dimly. Then suddenly the moon came from behind the cloud, and he had a subdued flash-light picture of two forms locked together in an embrace. Then, before he had time to look away, the girl had violently freed herself.

"You mustn't kiss me like that—never again," he heard her say. "I don't like it."

Then he caught a fragment of the man's words.

"If you turn me off I'll go to the devil," he said. "Without you I don't care what becomes of me."

"Don't threaten me with your weakness, Arthur," he heard the girl's voice disdainfully clear. "That is not the way to hold me."

Preston, an unintentional eavesdropper, hurried on. "Whatever it is that makes the Moon Girl unsusceptible, it is not poor Poe," he reflected.

A few evenings after that Preston met Inez at a reception at the house of another professor. He went to her rather more directly than was his wont. If Inez was unsusceptable, Preston had to the present time been even more so. Since the inevitable romantic experience of his college days he had never even imagined himself in love. Close upon his seriously pursued study of medicine and his even harder time as a hospital interne, had come the concentrated overwhelming experience of the war, a period during which he had been conscious of women only as human beings, helpful or to be helped. But now released from horrors, back in the atmosphere of normal life his reaction to beauty, charm, femininity was perhaps exaggeratedly sensitive. At least so Preston explained to himself the intensity of his interest in the Moon Girl.

She held out a cool hand to him. She was dressed in white, a gown of simple lines, pale and shimmering.

"More than ever you look the moon rose," said Preston who was one of those men who are not made silent by their emotions.

"I feel more like a gas lamp than a moon rose," she said. "It is much too warm to dance, but how is one to escape it commencement week?"

He looked down at her, noting that the heat had made her exquisitely pale rather than flushed. "Come out under the trees with me?" he suggested. "That would be a simple and effective if not entirely novel means of escape."

She glanced at him. "You are not a senior," she said. "This week is sacred to their pleasures."

He caught and held her pulsing blue eyes. "Not one of them wants you as much as I do," he said.

Her eyes glanced off and wandered about the room half filled with dancing couples. "You don't flatter me," she said.

"Oh, yes, I do—A senior could want you ever and ever so much—and yet not want you as much as I do."

Her wandering eyes, cool, curious, but unmoved came to rest in his. Again he had that odd sense of a blue flame fanned by some unseen wind into flickering light.

"There is a moon," he urged more lightly.

She looked away. "You have heard that absurd story about me," she said.

"A very picturesque story," he replied.

"I'm not as moon struck as you might suppose," she said.

Preston caught sight of Edgar Allan Poe approaching and bent over her. "Are you coming with me?" he asked, a dominating note creeping into his voice. "Or is the Black Knight going to win you away from me?"

She looked up, saw Warren and rose. "I will go with you for a little while," she said.

They wandered under the trees until they found a bench in the shadow. The girl leaned back, languid like a flower drooping a little under the afternoon sun. Preston let his eyes remain on her and the longer he looked the more he desired to look at her.

"Why did you run away when you were a child?" he asked.

She looked up at him quickly. "Am I a case?" she inquired, a tinge of sarcasm in her voice.

He shook his head. "No, a mystery."

Oddly she did not seem to like his answer. "There is nothing mysterious about me, I assure you," she said with extreme coldness.

He was a little surprised at her annoyance.

"Don't be offended! I am interested in everything about you," he said. "Especially in the things you have feeling about. You seem so icy cool and yet—I wondered what it was that drove you. Were you running away from something or seeking something?"

She hesitated a moment as if undecided whether to answer or not, then replied evasively, "It might be a combination of both, I suppose."

"Was it?" he asked.

She made an impatient movement. "How does a child know what moves it to do things? How can you analyze an urge of that kind? I suppose it was a gipsy impulse of some sort. It isn't uncommon in children. Why does it interest you so much in my case?"

Her tone was petulant. She lifted her eyes to his and met something that made her look away. "I am interested in everything about you," he said gravely.

He realized that she was not in the least infected with his emotion. He wondered with an intense curiosity what she was thinking.

If Arthur Warren could not awaken response in her, neither, it seemed, could he. . . . Yet there was intensity in the girl's face, more than a suggestion of strong feeling about the mouth. The girl was certainly capable of a strong interest in somebody or something. Who was it, or what was it? He must know the answer to that question.

CHAPTER III.

OUT OF TOWN.

TO Preston's viewpoint as a physician all possibilities were open without moral prejudice. He had seen women as delicately fashioned, as fine in type as Inez May the victims of a drug habit, yet

he knew that nothing of that sort was the matter with his clean and wholesome girl. Inez might have a talent for some sort that absorbed her time and interest. Yet such interests, while serving in the lack of others more personal and vivid, did not ordinarily make a woman unsusceptible as he instinctively felt this girl to be. Either she was in love with someone or absorbed in something. The more he looked at her, languidly lovely in the moonlight, the more he felt a sense of mystery about the girl.

A cloud began to pass across the moon already an imperfect circle of light—a waning moon.

"It is the dark of the moon," said Preston. "In three days there will not be any moon left."

The cloud covered the moon completely. He heard her laugh in the darkness. "Then I shall run away," she said, and rose.

The cloud passed. Preston rose also. "Suppose I pursue you," he said.

She turned upon him with hauteur. "Are you a detective? I thought you were a physician," she said. He looked at her in surprise.

"I only meant that I didn't want you to leave me," he said, surprise as well as a certain reserve in his tone.

With some evident recognition of how her quick retort must have sounded in his ears the girl turned with a quick change of mood.

"Forgive my stupid remark. I am a little bit tired, I think; commencement week has been too much for me." She held out her hand. He seized it, detaining it as long as he dared in his own. It lay an instant cool, passive, in his. There seemed no more possibility of response in it than in the touch of a flower. "I see Arthur on the verandah looking for me," she said, and drew back her hand. "I must go in."

Was she engaged to Warren, Preston wondered. But his point of view about her possible engagement was entirely modern. The idea that a man or a woman should be bound by their promise in matters of love he regarded as an outworn sentimentality. If perception of a mistake came after marriage, it must be dealt with, with all possible regard for the rights of both. But to walk unblinded into marriage with someone unloved, to hold oneself deliberately to a mistake before marriage—Preston held that that was nonsense. He did not intend to undermine Arthur Warren's hold on Inez, if hold he had, by any word or deed. But he felt under no obligation to conceal the nature of his own feelings from the girl, whether she was engaged or not. If she preferred him, he was not wronging the other man. Besides she had not admitted any engagement. It was only what Aline Mathews had said, and the thing he had seen in the moonlight.

He did not think Inez would let a man kiss her if she were not engaged to him, and yet that also was a convention not necessarily always adhered to by the nice girl of to-day.

"Inez!" exclaimed Arthur Warren as they came up the steps. "I have been wondering what had become of you." Poor Warren! There was no doubt about the nature of his feelings.

The next day Preston met Aline in the dusty trolley-choked regions of Harvard Square.

"Wasn't it horrid of Inez to run away commencement week," she said. "The belle of the ball! Just like her. She hasn't a ray of conscience."

"Run away!" exclaimed Preston with a curious sinking feeling. "You—you mean she has gone to make a visit somewhere?"

"Somewhere," repeated Aline in a sphinx like tone.

For the life of him Preston could not help pursuing the subject, even though his nicer instincts forbade further inquiry. "But you don't mean—of course her people know where she is—"

Aline's eyes twinkled. "Even if she took the trouble to tell the professor where she went, it is unlikely that he would know the minute after."

Aline's car approached and she waved him a gay farewell. "I don't see anything for it but that you'll have to wait till she comes back," she said mischievously, and boarded her car. Preston flushed like a schoolboy, but the question of Inez was of more importance to him than his momentary self-betrayal.

That evening he availed himself of her general invitation to call. Inez's nurse Esther opened the door: the parlor-maid was evidently out.

"No, Miss Inez is not at home," she said. "She's out of town for a few days."

Preston hesitated. "Has she—I hope she hasn't gone to New York in this heat," he said. "She said something about going there last week." He paused, waiting for an answer.

The old woman gave him a sidelong look. "She's gone to visit her aunt, Mrs. Perkins, in Concord," she said. "She'll be back in a few days. Who shall I say called?"

Preston left his card with the old woman and walked slowly down the gravel path to the sidewalk, wondering.

That evening after eleven o'clock his bell rang. A dark foreign-looking man who spoke with a strong accent stood at the door.

"Lady vera sick—dying maybe," the man said. "I take you quick." He jerked his head in the direction of a small motor standing at the curb. "You come?"

A few questions elicited the fact that the sick woman lived in the South End. "No poor. Pay good," said the man evidently attributing the doctor's hesitation to the only cause imaginable to his sort.

"I'll come," said Preston, and went to get his hat and case.

After a swift run through the empty streets to Boston the car turned into an old fashioned square in the "South End," the abode nowadays, the doctor knew, of a mixed class, mostly foreign but not poor. Doubtless several of the discreet old brick houses with their vine-covered bowed fronts might conceal Bolsheviks, political refugees of various sorts, bomb factories, even, gambling houses perhaps—any and every industry that had reason to avoid public notice.

He found the sick woman seriously ill with some sort of gastric inflammation but not in immediate danger. The man who had called for him flatly refused either to have a nurse or to have her taken to the hospital. Preston wondered if the man had something to conceal that made him fear exposure, then decided that is was just as probably the ignorance of the newly prosperous alien who would naturally regard nurses and hospitals as superfluous save in the last extremity.

As Preston was going down the steps to the street he saw a cab draw up before the next house. A woman got out alone, paused to pay the driver, then turned to walk up the steps. Preston stood amazed beyond the power of speech, for the girl was Inez May.

CHAPTER IV.

PRESTON PROBES.

WHILE he stood bewildered, incredulous, the door had opened and closed upon her. Preston turned to see the dark alien who waited to take him home grinning knowingly.

"Pretty girl, eh? Good looker," he said. Preston did not answer.

"Does she live there?" he asked the man.

But the alien only scowled, shrugged, shook his head and made some unintelligible reply. Preston again wondered whether this was concealment or ignorance. And could the girl by any possibility have been Inez May? And if so what in the name of Heaven was she doing there?

Preston noticed several "Room To Let" notices as the little low car whirled noisily out of the square, and he made note of the number and position of the house the girl had entered and decided to find out if possible the next morning what sort of a house it was.

"Why did you go to Cambridge for a doctor instead of calling one in the neighborhood?" Preston asked the man suddenly.

The man gave him an ugly look, shrugged and looked away.

"Over there to see friend," he said at last indicating the region across the Charles with a movement of his head. "'Phone home and hear she sick. Start home and stopa first doctor name I see."

Preston was inclined to doubt this story.

"Want me to come again to-morrow?" he asked.

"No; I call you," replied the man shortly. Preston glanced at him from time to

time wondering whether he were Italian or Spanish. "By the way, what is your name?" he asked.

The man gave him a sharp sullen suspicious look. "Why you aska me that?"

The doctor returned his scowling gaze with a steady look.

"Why do you object to telling me? It isn't usual in America to conceal one's name. How am I to send you a bill if I don't know your name?"

The man grinned, a look of relief spread over his face.

"Oh, I get you! I pay now." He drew out a large roll of bills and paid the price of the doctor's call at once.

The next day after his office hours Preston motored to the South End and turned in at the square he had been taken to the night before. He found the house that the girl who looked like Inez May had entered, and mounting the steps pushed the bell. A boy who looked like a Greek opened it.

"Have you any rooms to let?" he asked. He caught a glimpse of a quiet, respectable looking interior through the open door. The boy, noticing the glance, drew the door together and scowled suspiciously. "Who tell you to come here?" he demanded.

"Why I knew a good many of the houses about here let rooms and I liked the looks of this one," the doctor explained with an affectation of carelessness.

The Greek boy shook his head. "Don't let rooms," he said, and closed the door without further ceremony.

At the foot of the steps Preston paused, looking about. He caught sight of a policeman standing at the corner of the street and went toward him. As he did so he was aware that someone watched his progress and destination from behind the coarse lace curtain that shaded the window of Number 17.

"Can you tell me who lives in Number 17?" Preston asked the policeman. The officer gave him a glance of passing curiosity and shook his head. "How about 15?" he pursued. "I am a physician and was called to see a patient in that house. The man refused to give me his name."

The officer seemed willing to be more communicative about Number 15.

"It isn't just one family there," he said. "There's a lot of 'em—wops of some sort. Oh, it isn't a tenement or anything like that. The one that owns it is rich. They're all well off—big wages, you know, and they live cheap. The wop that owns it just lets his rooms out to his friends, not because he needs the money but they're used to living crowded up that way and seem to prefer it." The policeman grinned. "Seems like they get lonely just two or three in a room," he said. "But I know they're all right, sir."

That last statement coupled with the officer's lack of information about Number 17—or reluctance to give it—increased Preston's suspicions.

He looked up and saw the man still watching him.

"Of course a lot of them wops is mixed up in the white slave trade one way or another," he said, "but it's hard to prove it. They covers it with other business of some sort, but if you're thinking there's anything of that kind around here you're barkin' up the wrong tree. It ain't that sort of a neighborhood."

"On no, I wasn't thinking of anything like that," said Preston hastily, then with a nod to the officer he jumped into his car and took a turn that would eventually take him to Concord.

It was not difficult to find where Inez's aunt lived, a white-pillared house with green blinds on a quiet street shaded by tall elms. Preston went up the brick-paved walk and rang the bell. After some delay the door was opened by a female servant of Esther's generation. She seemed surprised at Preston's question.

"Why no, Miss Inez isn't here," she said. "She hasn't been here for several months. Mrs. Perkins is out driving."

It was the answer Preston had expected. Either old Esther did not know where Inez was, or knew and was concealing her whereabouts.

As he steered his car along the road to Boston, exceeding the local speed limit but luckily incurring no penalty for doing so, he no longer felt any sense of compunction for his intrusion into Inez's affairs. He knew that they had become of sufficient

importance to him to justify any amount in investigation. A painful tension, almost a sense of desperation had entered into his desire to probe the mystery. He intended to discover it at whatever cost.

CHAPTER V.

THE LAWS OF CHANCE.

THAT evening toward midnight Preston who had smoked innumerable cigars on the porch and had finally gone indoors to read a detective story, heard his bell ring—the doctor's bell, not that belonging to the household. He went to the door,—his aunt and their one servant were long since in bed—and saw the same man who had called him the night before.

"She's worse," he said. "I take you right away." He made a gesture toward the car.

"I'll come," said Preston, "but I'll use my own car. It will only take a minute to get it out. You go ahead in your own."

After a brief survey of his patient Preston said decidedly, "You have either got to send this woman to the hospital or—if you want me to keep the case—give her a room to herself and get a nurse."

The man shook his head. "No taka to hospital," he said stubbornly. "No nurse."

Preston reached for his hat. "Then you'll have to call another physician."

"All right," returned the foreigner.

As Preston went down the steps followed by the Italian, the door of the next house was flung wide and the Greek boy who had opened the door for him ran out with a frightened face. Catching sight of the two men he asked the Italian whom he seemed to know a hurried question. Preston caught the word "doctor". The alien jerked his thumb at Preston, "He doctor," he said.

The boy asked another question—where Preston lived probably, for the doctor saw that the thumb of the alien seemed to indicate a distant spot. With a look of relief the boy turned to the physician.

"You come?" he asked. Evidently he did not recognize Preston as his caller of the morning.

Preston nodded and accompanied the boy into the house next door. As he passed the half-open door to what was originally the New England parlor, Preston saw men and women sitting about tables playing cards and something else. He caught a half glimpse of a revolving wheel in another room.

A gambling house! That was why the Greek boy had so carefully guarded the entrance the day before, a door evidently open to patrons only.

In an upper room he found his patient, a heavy man, no longer young, evidently suffering from some sort of heart collapse. It did not take the physician long to bring him around. An Italian, with a waxed moustache and an impassive face, the proprietor evidently, asked the doctor's fee and paid it.

On his way down the stairs Preston noted that the door was wide open. In the middle of the flight he paused, struck dumb, an actual pain went through his heart—for there at the roulette table sat Inez May!

It may have been a second or five minutes that Preston stood there staring, then he walked down the stairs, into the room and straight up to the girl.

"Miss May," he said.

The girl started, stared up at him, then glanced away. "I think you have made a mistake," she said in a strained voice. "My name is not May."

Preston looked back at her steadily. "You have the face and voice of Inez May," he said. "It is not possible that I am mistaken."

He saw the girl's breast rise and fall tumultuously. She glanced about as if seeking some means of escape, and from the door-way he saw that the proprietor watched him, suspicious and frowning.

Then he became aware of a commotion in the hall, scrambling feet and voices raised in dispute. In another moment he realized what had happened—the place had been raided. The girl cast a frightened look about and saw a policeman approaching them.

"What has happened—what shall I do?" she cried.

"Leave it to me," said the doctor quietly.

He turned to speak to the officer and looked into the face of the roundsman he had talked with that morning.

Recognition was mutual. "I am, as I told you, a physician," said Preston. "I can show you my case, give you my card. This young lady," he indicated the shrinking figure of Inez who stood beside him with averted head, "was with me. I came here to see a patient. You—you won't need to detain us, will you?"

The officer—an Irishman—glanced at Inez and with the chivalry and intuition of his race grasped something essential in the situation.

"Sure—it's all right," he said, "take the young lady with you. An' you'd better hurry, boss. There might be a crowd gathering in the street."

He did not speak to Inez until they were in the car turning out of the square.

"I am afraid you will be cold," he said. "Put the robe around your shoulders."

"I'm all right," she said hastily, "it is a warm night. But—" she hesitated, "I left my hat there. I can get another at a house near here." She turned her face aside. "People I know," she finished in a low voice. She glanced up at him. "Oh, what *must* you think of me!" she said.

"I am not thinking, I am waiting for you to tell me," he replied.

"I don't deserve it," she said, and covered her eyes with her hand.

After a minute she looked up. "It's in that street—the house I spoke of. I had better stop for a hat in case we should meet someone we know."

She pointed out the house; it was in a quiet respectable looking block of lodging-houses. As the car slowed up before the door she turned and looked at him.

"You needn't get out," she said. "I'll run right in."

But Preston insisted upon getting out and going with her to the door.

"I have a key," she said. He took it from her hand. "Let me open the door for you."

The key turned easily in the latch, he opened the door and she held out her hand for the key. With the key in her possession and the door knob in her hand she turned to him. He caught an odd flash in her eyes.

"You have saved me from a terrible experience," she said. "I thank you. But you must let me go my own way now. I am safe here. Don't follow me." And then she was inside the hall and had closed the door upon him.

Preston stood where she had left him motionless with astonishment. The strong atraction the girl had for him added to his chivalrous desire to protect her, made him want to follow her and force her to go with him. But following that impulse came a sense of revulsion, the shock of discovering this beautiful girl to be something so different from what he had imagined her to be. And yet she did not look like a girl who would be found alone in a gambling house. . . .*Was* she alone? After all what did he know about her?

He glanced up at the house and noted the number, and at the corner the name of the street. Then he drove home alone through the deserted streets, a prey to painful and conflicting thoughts.

CHAPTER VI.

HEART'S EASE.

THE next morning Preston telephoned to Professor May's house. He was told that Miss May was still away. His next step was to motor over to the South End and go directly to the house where he had left Inez the night before. The landlady, a neat but unusually forlorn specimen of her class, shook her head in answer to his question.

"There isn't any Miss May here," she said. "I don't ever remember to have had a lodger by that name." The woman looked him over and observing his disturbed face inquired, "Was she a young lady?"

"About twenty-two or so," replied Preston.

"The only young lady lodger I have is Miss Slade, Miss Selina Slade," she said.

"Is she blonde and rather tall?" asked Preston.

The woman nodded. "She's a very handsome young lady," she said, "and very

quiet. Never looks at anyone. She isn't here much. She is a traveling saleslady."

Preston hesitated on the verge of entering into a closer description of the blonde saleslady, then for some reason decided not to pursue his investigation. He turned aside.

"The lady I thought lived here is named May not Slade," he said. "I have evidently made a mistake in the address. I'm sorry to have troubled you." And lifting his hat in recognition of the landlady's submerged but still existent claim to womanhood, went down the steps.

"You might try No. 22," she suggested, looking after him. "They take lodgers there."

But Preston did not try No. 22. He went home in a very unhappy mood. Whether the girl was living at the house under an assumed name or had some affiliation with some other lodger there—whatever it was it spelled concealment, wrong-doing.

At the corner of Brattle Street he was drawn out of his bitter reflections with a shock, for on the crossing he suddenly found himself looking into the faces of Inez May and Arthur Warren. He caught a glimpse of the girl's white face. It was Warren who spoke in a mood of unusual gaiety.

"I say, I'll report you for exceeding the speed limit," he called out. "You almost ran over us."

Preston answered with an apology of some sort and drove slowly homeward.

He did not try to see Inez after that. A deep depression took possession of him. He wondered if she would attempt to make any sort of explanation to him, but the days passed and she made no effort of any sort to get in touch with him.

The young physician decided that he must forget her, stop seeking explanations and excuses for her. After all what excuse could there be? It was possible that she had had some grave need of money and had taken that way to get it. Yet what nice girl would have chosen such a way as that? It was just a case of a girl of criminal tendencies born in a nice family—that was all. It had happened before. He remembered what Aline Mathews had said about Inez—"taking French leave of her social responsibilities" was the way Aline had put it. Aline knew that Inez made mysterious visits, yet she had added, no one seemed to be suspicious about it, unless it were Aline, herself. So this was the explanation of the atmosphere of mystery he had felt about Inez.

One evening about ten days after his shocking and upsetting discovery, Preston received an urgent telephone from Professor May's house. It was a servant telephoning. Dr. May had had some sort of an attack, the doctor must come at once, *at once*, the voice repeated in the accents of panic.

In a few minutes Preston was in the May's library examining his patient. He was conscious of Inez standing with a white face beside her father waiting for his verdict. It seemed that she had been out when the professor was taken ill and that he had been summoned by one of the servants.

When the professor had been restored to consciousness and was reclining on the couch in his library where he had been stricken, the physician turned to Inez.

"Where can I have a little talk with you?" he asked.

"In the drawing-room," said Inez and led the way. Outside she turned a pale face upon him. "Is it very serious?" she asked.

"I am afraid so," he answered gravely, "a bad case of valvular heart trouble. This can't be the first attack he has had."

"Once before he had something of the sort," replied Inez, "we thought it was the heat."

"Had anything happened to upset him to-day?" he asked.

"Nothing that I know of," she said.

They were in the large cool drawing-room, seated near a window that overlooked the garden. A breeze ruffled the white curtain and the sleepy chirp of birds came from the trees.

"He ought not to be left alone," said Preston. "Really he should have a nurse."

Inez caught her breath. "Is there immediate danger?" she asked. Preston realized that the girl must be very fond of her absent-minded scholarly father.

"It is hard to tell in heart cases," he replied. "But probably not."

"Will you get the nurse?" asked Inez.

"At once." He rose to go, but her voice arrested him.

"Dr. Preston—can you stay a minute longer? Or are you in a great hurry?" she said. She raised her beautiful eyes to his and he noted their effect of pulsing light. The next instant they fell and a flush mounted her cheek. "There is something I want to tell you," she said.

"Of course I can wait," replied Preston, and reseated himself in the Hepplewhite armchair by the window.

A bit of honeysuckle blew in the open window on a passing zephyr. Its fragrance, heavy-sweet, mingled with the sudden wave of emotion that assailed him, while he waited for the girl to speak.

He saw that she was struggling for self-command and a sense of her agitation communicated itself to him.

"You must have wondered that I have never given you any explanation of that dreadful night" she said at last. "You must have thought—". She paused with a shudder. "What *must* you have thought of me!" she exclaimed.

"I have known that there must be some explanation not so discreditable to you as it seemed," said Preston.

She shivered. "I will tell you," she said. "You can judge for yourself."

"I shall be glad to hear anything you want to tell me," Preston said, "but please don't feel obliged to tell me just because of the accident of my finding you there."

"No, I want to tell you," she said, "lest you think it is worse than it is."

She paused, then after a moment began her story and told it to the end without further break or hesitation.

"You have heard probably—someone must have told you—how I used to run away when I was a child?" He nodded. "I couldn't seem to help it then—I can't now. When I was a child I used to play I was someone else, living somewhere else—a child stolen by the gypsies or something of that sort. When I grew up I knew that it was some excitement I wanted, I think my mother was like that. Esther says so.

"One time I was visiting some friends for the week-end. They were the kind that play bridge for money. I never had done it before. When I felt the tenseness of that kind of game playing—so different from anything I had ever known—I knew I had found the thing my nature craved. Of course people don't play cards for money in Cambridge, so I never had a chance to betray myself there. Sometimes I have an opportunity in Boston.

"Last summer while I was abroad with some friends we went to Monte Carlo and for the first time I saw a roulette wheel. I think I sort of went mad about it. My friends were frightened and took me away the next morning. It isn't at all the money I care about, and the funny part is I seem always to keep about even—I never win much and seldom lose, that is why the terrible excitement of it keeps up. But I don't always want to do it."

She paused and hesitated. "It sounds absurd, yet it seems as if there were some truth in what old Esther says about the moon. It always comes on me then, this strange craving, in the dark of the moon—moon fever, she calls it. Esther believes in the influence of the stars, she says that the moon rules games of chance and that is why I have this strange passion for gambling."

"Is Esther the only one who knows?" asked Preston.

"Yes, she found it out and has protected me from discovery. It would kill my father if he knew. I don't believe anyone has so much as suspected. I heard of that house in the South End accidentally, as a place carefully protected and not in a neighborhood where—I mean that it is a place I can go to safely—it—it is not otherwise disreputable. I have been going there ever since last winter. No one seems to care who you are. The proprietor never lets men annoy me. It is practically a place for gambling fiends like myself—people who play to win money or people who play because they have the gambling fever in their blood." She paused again and hearing her difficult breathing, Preston put his hand over hers without looking at her.

"Don't tell me any more if you would rather not," he said.

She drew her hand quickly from under

his and went on, "No, I want you to know all. No one there knows my real name. I call myself Selina Slade. I have a room in that house where you took me. It is an inexpensive neighborhood. The landlady thinks I am some sort of a traveling saleswoman. I always keep the room, and when the fit takes me I go there and stay until it is over."

She stopped there as though her story were finished, and a little silence fell between them. Preston's first comment was a professional question.

"Does it worry you?" he asked. "Are you fearful of being found out so that the thing wears upon your nerves?"

She shook her head. "No, I don't think of it that way. I never seem to think of discovery. At first I looked upon it as a sort of lark. Then, one evening after I came back, as I was sitting with father in his study I looked at his white head and I suddenly realized how dreadful it would seem to him and I felt terribly. It struck me with a sort of despair. Then that feeling passed and—I am afraid I didn't think or feel any way about it until I looked up that night and saw you. Then—then I felt as if I wanted to kill myself!"

He was startled by the passion in her voice and answered with intentional lightness, "No, no; nothing like that. It's going to be a case of cure, not kill."

She rose from her seat. He knew that she wanted him to go now.

She put out her hand.

"I must go back to father now," she said. "I wanted you to know the truth. And will you send the nurse right away?"

"Immediately," he promised. He detained her hand an instant trying to read her face.

"Then we are friends," he said, "friends for keeps?"

She turned away trembling as if on the verge of tears. "I shall never forget what you were like that night," she said; then added in a low tone, "and what you saved me from."

"We are not going to think about that," said Preston, and following his impulse, bent and pressed his lips upon her hand. But with an exclmation she drew back her hand and left him standing there. She did not go to her father. He heard her light steps hurrying up the stairs.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS MARTIN TELEPHONES.

PRESTON for his part sat long at his window that night. At the end of his third cigar the physician's standpoint had overcome the shock his personal feelings had received the night of his discovery. "A psychic peculiarity," he said, "obsession, or whatever you choose to call it—just a case, as I told her—curable, of course."

He rose and threw away the remains of his cigar. "And so there is an end of the mystery of fair Inez," he said. After all he was glad it was not another man.

He did not see her for several days, although once he caught a glimpse of her playing tennis with Arthur Warren.

When he made his occasional calls on Professor May he saw the nurse, but once in the evening he met Inez in the hall.

"How do you find my father?" she asked, and after his characteristically professional answer, "As well as can be expected," would have passed on and left him, but he detained her.

"Please do not let the fact of my unhappy discovery make any difference between us," he said. "Remember I am a physician and understand everything. To me your passion for gambling isn't any different from any of those queer little freaks people have that make them want to touch every post they pass, or keep washing their hands all day—or anything of that sort."

Then he saw that she was trembling, saw in her eyes, that instant before she turned away, something that made him catch his breath.

"Inez!" he cried. She turned to escape. He put out his hand and caught hers. "Don't run away from me," he said.

An instant he felt her hand cling to his, felt a thrill of response indescribably sweet, then she drew it from him.

"Did you know that I am engaged to Arthur Warren?" she said.

Preston stood very still. It was some time before he spoke. " No, I did not know it," he said. He moved toward the door, then paused again on the threshold. She was leaning against the doorway looking out into the fragrant darkness.

" You say you are engaged to him. You did not say that you are in love with him."

It was a moment before she answered, " You have no right to ask me that."

" Yes, I have," returned Preston steadily. " because I love you."

She put out her hand with a wild movement. " Oh, no, no, you mustn't say that," she cried, and covered her face.

" It is true," he said.

She answered him after a moment, her face turned from him. " No, I am not in love with Arthur," she said, " but he seems to care a great deal for me—so much so—a strange bit of irony—that it has pulled him out of all sorts of things that were ruining him. I felt that if I could keep him straight by letting him think I cared for him it sort of squared the deception of my own life."

" I see no reason why you should sacrifice yourself if you don't love him," said Preston. " We are getting away from all those false emotional ideas about things. I cannot see you as a sinner. I don't think it is right for you to regard yourself in that light. I should like to cure you—or if I can't—to find a psychiatrist who can."

She shook her head. " Perhaps—I mean I'll try. But it doesn't alter my decision about Arthur. I told you because I thought you ought to know."

For the next two weeks he saw nothing of Inez, then one evening he was again called to see Professor May. He had all his conversation with the nurse, however; Inez did not come into the room while he was there. He asked if she was at home.

" She's resting," the nurse replied. " She stays with her father to-night. I have the evening off—that is, if you think it is safe for me to go? Miss Inez is as good as a nurse."

" I don't like his symptoms," said the doctor. " He might go any minute, and yet, of course, he may last another year; it is impossible to tell. I suppose there is no reason why you shouldn't go out." He left disappointed in his anticipation of seeing Inez.

At eleven o'clock that night his telephone rang. It was Miss Martin, Professor May's nurse. " Can you come at once," she said. "—Yes, it is very serious."

" Directly," replied Preston and hung up the receiver.

Miss Martin met him at the door. Without a word she led him into the professor's study where he had been seated in his reclining chair reading when the doctor had called a few hours before. Preston knew what had happened the minute he saw the twisted figure half fallen over in its chair.

" Was no one with him? What happened?" he asked.

" I left him with Miss Inez at eight o'clock," said the nurse. " When I came in fifteen minutes ago I saw the light in here and found him like this. Miss Inez is nowhere to be found. She isn't in the house. I didn't know what to do. I didn't like to call the servants."

When the necessary arrangements had been made Preston went as swiftly as his motor would take him to the house in the South End where Inez lived as Selina Slade. While he was still doubtful as to the best means of getting in contact with Inez, if she were there, without arousing curiosity that might end in exposure, he saw a girl coming down the street who resembled Inez.

He waited, then as she came under the street lamp he went directly up to her.

" You must come back with me at once," he said.

She drew back quickly. " Oh, why have you come!" she exclaimed. " Please forget me—leave me alone. It's no use. I tried not to come, but I couldn't keep away. If you take me back I will only return here to-morrow."

He shook his head. " Not when you know what has happened," he said, gravely.

She looked at him with a growing terror in her eyes. " Not father—" she said.

" I don't want to tell you here, please don't make me," said Preston. " Get in the car and let me tell you as we drive along."

She obeyed him without speaking. When they had crossed Washington Street and

were away from the noise of the elevated trains she said:

"Tell me, please. It is terrible not to know."

He looked at her compassionately, then said, "Yes, it is your father, Inez."

"Not dead!" Inez cried. "Oh no, no, not dead!"

Her agonized eyes clung to his face. He nodded and turned away. "Yes, he is gone," he said.

"Oh, my God!" cried Inez under her breath. "He was asleep—I never thought. Oh, I can't bear it—I have killed him!"

CHAPTER VIII.

PARACELSUS AND THE MOON.

"NOT that," said Preston, suffering with her. "It must have happened soon in any case."

"If I had been there perhaps it would not have happened," she said.

"It probably would have happened just the same," said the doctor, compassionately. In the shadow of a dark street under the trees he turned and took her in his arms. "My darling," he said, "I am so sorry, so terribly sorry."

She remained an instant in his arms and he was conscious of her hard-drawn breath.

"If you would only let me take you into my life and make it right," he said. "If you would marry me—"

But she drew back with a bitter laugh. "Never," she said, "never that. Whatever mess I may make of my own life I won't drag *you* in."

"If that is your only reason," began Preston, "it is no reason at all."

"It isn't," she interrupted him. "My reason is because I don't care for you and never can—and how can we speak of such things now after this terrible thing has happened? My poor father, my dear, kind father, to think I left him alone to die."

She began to cry, great racking sobs that seemed as if they would tear her to pieces. Then as suddenly she stopped.

"Poor little girl, don't feel so terribly. He was close to the end in any case." Preston tried to console her. She answered after a brief moment in a voice choked but quiet:

"Don't try to think of kind generous lies to console me with—don't think about me at all—in any way. Just get me home as quickly as you can, then forget that I am in the world."

"You ask the impossible when you ask me to forget you," said Preston quietly. "But be assured I will get you home as soon as I possibly can."

After her father was buried, Preston persuaded Inez to go away to a quiet place on the North Shore, and finally she consented.

In August he took a brief vacation and could not resist going to see how she was, for she would not answer his letters. He found her down on the rocks in her bathing-suit, warming herself in the sun after her swim. She rose to her feet and gave a startled exclamation when she saw him.

"Oh, why have you come!" she cried.

"Aren't you even a little bit glad to see me?" he said, and put out his hand.

Inez looked down. "I asked you to forget me," she said.

He smiled. "Did you think it was as easy as that?"

"Don't please—" she said, and turned from him.

After a moment he said, "All right, I promise not to stay, but now I am here can't I have just a little visit with you? Let's sit down here together and let me hear a little something about you."

She sat down reluctantly and he arranged himself on the rock beneath her. He noted the flickering light in her eyes, the tremulous sweetness of her lips, and mastered an almost overwhelming impulse to take her in his arms.

"Where is Warren?" he asked, with a sharp twinge of jealousy. "Is he here, too?"

She nodded.

"Lucky devil!" said Preston. "If I start down the primrose path will you forsake him and rescue me?"

Inez rose, her breath tumultuously rising and falling. "I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I'm getting chilly." He looked at her and knew that it was an excuse. "I think I'd better go in and take off my bathing-suit;

and—please don't wait for me. I'm feeling pretty shabby yet, and not really up to seeing people."

He attributed her agitation to her embarrassment at his knowledge of her secret but his face shadowed with disappointment. The next moment he arose to go.

"If that is the case I mustn't tax your strength," he said.

He did not try to see her again but went back to Boston by a late afternoon train.

The first of September he learned from Aline Mathews that Inez had returned to Cambridge.

Before his vacation was over Preston called on Dr. Brinsmade, the celebrated alienist who had been a classmate of his, and laid Inez's case before him.

"I suppose it might be classed as a case of periodic mania," the alienist said when the general practitioner had finished his description, "although it hardly seems sufficiently over the border to call it mania. The further I go into the study of so-called abnormal psychology the more I am inclined to think that we specialists in nerve disorders go to extremes in labeling conditions as pathologic and abnormal—unless we are willing to class the greater part of humanity as non-normal. The periodicity of the gambling impulse in her case is its peculiar feature—yet not the fact of periodicity in itself, for that law operates throughout the universe. But the fact that this excessive craving for the excitement of gambling actually does coincide with a given position of the moon. I should not be inclined to call that accidental. You know, of course, that the beginnings of the study of medicine and medical treatment were in astrology—old Paracelsus knew several things that modern scientists are just beginning to discover."

"Are you going to suggest a moonbeam cure?" inquired Preston, speaking lightly to cover his real feeling.

The alienist laughed. "I wasn't—but I am not prepared to say that such a cure could not be devised or will not be at some period of the world's history! I was going to say that the psychic or physical root of the impulse probably lies in that craving for excitement in the girl's nature, and that if that craving were satisfied by a life full of events, responsibilities, interests, emotions—the mania would probably disappear.

"If such a girl should become a war-nurse say, or even—" the doctor paused—"even fall very thoroughly in love, get married, have a little family to look after— it would undoubtedly cure her."

Dr. Brinsmade noted a quick flush on Preston's cheek and made his deductions. He finished his diagnosis, looking out of the window so that Preston did not observe the twinkle in his eyes.

"So if you know of any good-looking, promising young man who is equipped to undertake the job of rescue—just start things moving," he concluded.

Preston thanked him and rose. He could not take the matter in the light spirit in which the alienist treated it. "Marrying poor Warren isn't going to pull her out of it," the young doctor thought as the train carried him in the direction of Boston. "And I'm afraid I couldn't accept that as a solution even if it would."

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER THE WILLOW TREE.

SOON after Inez returned to Cambridge, Preston went to call on her, but she excused herself and he was obliged to leave without seeing her. Then one morning walking through the Public Garden by a path circling the pool he found her seated on a secluded seat under a willow tree.

"Is it possible that Boston ever sits in its own park?" he said, looking down at her in amused astonishment.

She glanced up with something of her old *ésprit*. "Boston may not—but you see Cambridge does."

"May I sit with you a moment?" She nodded assent, her color rising, and he quickly availed himself of the permission. "I had thought even in Boston these benches were reserved for the exclusive use of the derelict alien," he remarked.

"No," she said. "There is a real Boston spinster with her knitting and a book. Look at her shoes, her hair, her hat—pure unmistakable Boston, neither derelict nor alien."

"True," he agreed, his eyes resting upon her with something a shade too intent in their gaze. She looked away from him, apparently watching the slow-moving swan-boats filled with children circling the little lake, and spoke in a changed voice.

"You must have thought me very rude and queer when you came to see me at Pigeon Cove that day, but really I was having a hard fight to keep myself together, and seeing you brought everything all back." She paused, hesitated, then added with apparent difficulty, "But I want you to know that that queer moon fever as Esther calls it has not come back since. I hope—I almost believe—that that terrible shock cured me."

"Of course I understand why it upset you to see me," said Preston. "And I think it is probable that it may not come again." A little silence fell between them.

Then suddenly Preston said the thing he had resolved to say. "You told me once that you were not in love with Warren. If that is true, I think it is very wrong for you to marry him. I don't say this just because I want you so terribly myself, but because I think it is really a wrong thing, an absurd idea of du'y, for anyone to marry a person they do not love."

"It doesn't matter whom I marry," said Inez with a touch of passion in her voice.

"Then why not marry me?" said Edward Preston. She looked away from his smile and shook her head. I told you I could never do that," she said and rose. At that moment Preston discovered that Arthur Warren was coming toward them. He saw the look of astonishment on the young man's face change to the darker shade of jealousy. With the keenness of the lover to such things, Warren noted the signs of agitation in Inez's face, and perceived without understanding its cause, the self-consciousness they both felt at being thus unexpectedly confronted with the subject of their conversation.

Warren paused beside them. "Life is certainly stranger than fiction," he said, "who would have expected to find fair Inez keeping a rendezvous in the Public Garden?"

Inez laughed nervously. "That is very like Dr. Preston's remark when he discovered me here a few minutes ago," she said. "But I showed him another descendant of Plymouth Rock in a seat hard-by, so I am not as eccentric as you both thought."

Warren looked from the girl to the physician and back again, an ominous flash in his eyes. Inez saw it and tried to deflect a possible scene. "Take me to the street and find me a cab, Arthur," she said. "I don't feel like going home in the car." She spoke to Preston avoiding his eyes, "Which way are you going?"

"I was on my way to the library," he said.

Inez turned in the opposite direction. He understood. "Let's go to the Charles Street entrance, Arthur, the path is shadier this way," she said.

Preston lifted his hat and bade them goodby. Inez and Warren walked on slowly and in silence. Had the girl not been absorbed in other thoughts she would have realized the signs of gathering storm in Warren's face and made further efforts to distract him.

"Does Preston know that you are engaged to me?" he demanded at length in a suppressed voice.

Inez glanced up, startled by his tone. "Yes, I told him some time ago," she said.

"And yet he doesn't hesitate to let you see that he is in love with you," he said. "That would seem to suggest that you have encouraged him."

Inez replied in an expressionless voice, "I have not encouraged him, Arthur."

"No? In any case he doesn't seem to have given up hope," pursued Warren, his growing excitement evident in his voice.

Inez gave him a glance in which scorn and pity were mingled. "You mustn't speak to me like that, Arthur," she said.

"No, I must be a good Fido and keep to heel!" said Warren bitterly. "I understand. I can't stay in the room if I annoy you with my attentions. I am sure I don't know why you want to marry me. You don't love me."

"I told you that at the time," replied Inez, "and you expressed yourself then as perfectly satisfied to take me on those terms. Have you changed your mind?"

She raised her cool eyes to his, and looking down in them a sort of despair seized upon the man.

"I wanted you on any terms," he said. "That is the trouble. I suppose with the idiotic egotism of humanity I thought my love would awaken yours, but it doesn't seem to have worked that way."

"Shall we consider the engagement broken then, since it has not worked out as you hoped," she said, then was startled at the violence of the passion that flamed up in his face.

"So that you will be free to engage yourself to him?" he asked.

"That is my affair," said Inez.

"Don't push me too far," said Warren, his breath coming unevenly. "I don't know what I might do."

"Don't threaten me," said Inez, a touch of contempt in her voice. "It can't influence me and it is such a childish thing to do."

Then suddenly all the anger and passion went out of the man's face, leaving only a look of anguish. "Inez, you don't want to throw me over, do you? Forgive what I said. I lost my head—I will accept any terms—only so that you do not give me up."

"I had no intention of breaking the engagement, Arthur," she said in the same even tone. "But you mustn't treat me to scenes like this if you want to keep me."

Warren promised with pathetic eagerness not to forget himself again. They had reached the Charles Street entrance now. Inez discovered a disengaged hansom standing at the curb and went directly up to it.

Warren waited after he had put her in it. "May I go with you, Inez?" he begged, but she shook her head.

"I am tired. I want to be alone," she said. "Tell the cabman where to go, please."

Warren watched her drive away with a sinking heart.

That evening, too unhappy about Inez to be able to put her out of his thoughts, Warren went to see her about half past eight. As it chanced, the bell was answered by old Esther who told him that Miss Inez was ill and could not see anyone.

Warren, bitterly disappointed, hesitated on the threshold. In the exaggerated condition of his emotions he felt that he must have some communication, some reassurance, from the girl he loved so unreasoningly.

He scribbled on his card, "Please send me just a line. I am so sorry you are ill, and I am so very wretched about this morning."

He remembered afterwards the hesitation with which Esther had taken the card. She returned after a moment looking troubled.

"Miss Inez says there is no answer," she said, then noting the expression on Warren's face added, "She was feeling too ill to write anything, sir. I guess you'll hear from her some time tomorrow."

As Warren walked slowly down the street he met Aline Mathews.

"Cross my palm with silver and I'll tell your fortune," Aline said with a mischievous look. "You have been to see Inez and she was out. You have heard that she has gone to Boston and don't know whether to follow her or not—" Aline broke off suddenly in her nonsense when she saw the look on Warren's face.

"Esther just told me that she was at home ill—too ill to see me," he said in a strained voice.

Aline looked momentarily embarrassed. "I must have been mistaken," she said, "I thought I saw her get on a car about half an hour ago, but it must have been her double."

Warren walked on without any fixed destination; his jealous suspicions of the morning returned in full force. He went into the first drug-store he came to and called up Dr. Preston from a telephone booth.

"He's not home, he's in Boston," the maid answered. "Any message?"

"Do you know where he is?" asked Warren, but the maid did not know.

With a half-formed idea of following Inez, of somehow finding her, Warren took the subway into Boston. But by the time he got out at Park Street he realized the futility of any such attempt, and so instead he deliberately set out to deaden remembrance with alcohol.

With the result he set out to achieve

only partially accomplished, Warren remembered the thrill to be extracted from the roulette wheel, and started in a direction where he knew such desires might be gratified.

CHAPTER X.

OVER THE GREEN TABLE.

IT was a quiet place in the South End. Even the palled *habitués* of the place were quiet. Only in the eyes of all the terrible intensity of the gambler was perceptible.

Warren joined a game of baccarat and won. In spite of that stimulus he threw down his cards at the second round, suddenly bored. He asked where the roulette wheel was, and was shown into an adjoining room. Without even glancing at the people seated and standing about, Warren took a seat, chose his number and fixed his gaze on the revolving wheel. The first time he won, but the second time he lost, and he saw a hand—a woman's hand—reaching out for the money. Something about the hand made his gaze travel up to the woman's face. For a moment he remained staring stupidly into her startled eyes, then he rose to his feet with a gasp.

"Inez," he cried, "Inez May! My God!"

Inez rose quickly. Several people looked at them; some of the glances were glazed and unseeing, others curious, but the next moment all eyes returned to the magnet of the table—with one exception—a pale, dissipated-looking man of about forty continuing to stare at the girl with his dark burning eyes, attracted, almost startled, it seemed, by some quality in her blond beauty. He watched her as she spoke in a low voice to Marinelli, the proprietor, before she passed out of the room, presumably making some excuse for the incident. His eyes followed her as she guided Warren's unsteady steps in the direction of a small reception room opening from the hall; then he rose and went to speak to Marinelli, evidently questioning him. Marinelli answered in a low voice, briefly and without expression in his face.

In the reception room Inez faced Warren. She was very pale but she had recovered her self-possession.

"You have been drinking," she said quietly. "Don't you think you had better go home?"

Warren answered with a wild laugh, "*I* had better go home," he cried unsteadily, "*I*—" Then he drew his hands across his eyes. "Am I mad or dreaming!" he said. "*You* in this low place, you, Inez, that I thought so pure and good."

The girl started and quivered at his words. "You insult me with your suspicions," she said. "I have come here to gamble, I admit. But I know no one here. *You* are the first man here who has ever insulted me."

"Oh, my God," said Warren. "You have come before— How often—for how long—don't answer me, it doesn't matter — And you expect me to believe that none of these men—I don't believe it!" he cried.

"*Arthur!*" cried the girl, staring at him with wide eyes. "Arthur—how *can* you say such a terrible thing to me—oh, how *can* you think it!" In anguish she turned to flee from the room. She saw Warren put his hand behind him, still laughing insanely, his eyes fixed upon her face.

"You think you are going back there!" he cried. "In that room—with those men —*never!* Never again—" and suddenly he drew his hand out from behind him. She heard the sound of a shot, then, as in a dream, saw his hand that held the small gleaming object turned toward his head, then the second shot. And still in that swift horrible dream she saw him lying there on the floor, a crumpled object with a red stain slowly spreading down his cheek.

Then a while she stood staring, rooted there as in a nightmare, a group of faces seethed about the door, people were crowding into the room. She was aware still, in that unnatural dreamlike way of a man's dark eyes fixed upon her, then of Marinelli —quiet, masterful, shutting the faces and voices from the room, leaving only one other person, a trusted servant, with whom he talked in rapid Italian as they bent over the wounded man. After a moment Marinelli looked up.

"Not dead," he said. "We must have a doctor at once. Get Toriati," he instructed the servant.

The servant returned almost immediately, evidently accompanied by someone that he shut outside in the hall as he addressed his employer.

"Doctor right outside the door, just pass by," he said. "I tell him come in. Same doctor come here before and call twice on Maria Tugarone next door."

"Bring him in," said Marinelli briefly, "no time to lose." Then Inez, still in that hideous dream, saw Preston enter and knew that he was not surprised to find her there.

Preston bent down and gave the wounded man a brief professional examination. "The bullet glanced aside," he said. "His aim was bad. He had been drinking heavily. I don't think the wound is fatal. But we must get him to the hospital at once."

Marinelli looked troubled. "Won't that mean the police?"

Preston shook his head. "I'll order a private ambulance, and take him to the hospital myself. Of course we must keep it all as quiet as possible."

The man looked immensely relieved. "Justa tell me what you want to do," he said.

"First get all your people out," said Preston. "Tell them the man isn't dead, then I will telephone for the ambulance." He looked at Inez. "Is there any way that she can get out absolutely unnoticed?" he asked.

"Easily," replied the Italian. "There is a door from the basement into the cellar of the next house. The people who live there are Italians—friends of mine."

"Then if you will help me first to lift him up on that divan—" Preston said, "and come back when you have got rid of your guests."

With the Italian's assistance he lifted the unconscious body of Warren and laid it upon the divan. It was not until Marinelli had left the room that he spoke directly to Inez.

"Sit down," he said, "and take this," he gave her a small glass of brandy from a flask in his case. Then his attention seemed to become suddenly riveted upon a place in the wall back of where she had stood. He went up to it, examined it, and turned to question her with a white face.

"Did Warren try to shoot you before he shot himself?" he asked. She nodded. "Good God!"

Marinelli returned quickly without knocking. "The coast is clear," he said. "I stay with him. George the Greek boy show you where to go. Then he take you to telephone."

Preston turned to Inez. "Come," he said.

She followed him silently. In the hall the Greek boy led them down the stairs and pointed out the door.

"I wish I could go with you," said Preston, adding in a voice too low for the waiting boy to hear. "You still have that room in Duncan Street?" Inez looked away as she answered, "Yes," in a low voice.

"Then wait for me there," he said. "You mustn't go anywhere else on any account. This may be very serious."

"I know," she said.

The boy George came forward. "Upstairs go out back way to service alley, miss," he said, "then no one in a street see you."

She thanked the boy and passed through the door that Preston held open for her. He stood looking after her a moment as she passed into the darkness, troubled, uneasy, then realizing the urgent duties awaiting him turned and followed the boy upstairs to the telephone. He was aware as he did so of a curious expression on the Greek's face—caused perhaps by the flickering of the single gas-jet on the grimy stairs. Yet it left an unpleasant impression on Preston's mind and he wondered about it uneasily as he made his quick competent preparations to get the wounded man to the hospital.

CHAPTER XI.

A BIT OF GLASS.

ALONE in the almost total darkness of the cellar Inez stood a moment trying to get her bearings.

"Walk toward the windows," the Greek

boy had said. "The door to the stairs is right there."

She saw the basement windows, vague squares of light at her left, and walked toward them, then paused as she felt for the door handle, overcome with that indescribable sense of another person in the room.

The next moment an electric candle flashed in her face and she saw directly in front of her a small dark Italian who stood with his back to the door.

"Better not go yet," he said.

A sudden panic seized Inez. "Yes, yes; I must go right away," she said.

"No," said Guiseppe Tugarone, and showed irregular and missing teeth in a grin.

"Let me pass," said Inez. She took a step toward the door.

Then, scarcely realizing at first what had happened to her, she found herself reeling against the wall with a sharp pain in her head.

"Try it again," said the Italian, "and I break your dam' head." Then he went out and locked the door.

A sense of sick faint horror came over Inez and she sank down on the floor. Then after a moment her brain steadied and she began to think. She struggled to her feet and began to examine the room. First she tried the windows. They were nailed shut. One was fastened tight, but the second one seemed loose. Now that her eyes had become accustomed to the gloom she was able to see the outlines of objects, and she started to look about for an implement.

The floor was covered with a litter of various sorts of rubbish, but feeling about she finally discovered a fairly strong iron bar that she thought might serve her purpose. She picked it up and tried the loose window. She pried at it with the bar until her arms ached, but she couldn't dislodge it. She rested a moment, then another thought occurred to her. She could break the glass and the wooden frame that held the small panes, and perhaps escape that way if no one noticed the sound. She would wait until some noisy vehicle passed in the street then she would throw the iron bar against it with all her strength.

For a long time nothing passed. It was a deserted neighborhood not near any of the main arteries of traffic, and Inez had almost given up hope when she heard the heavy dull crash of an approaching motor truck. She raised her iron bar, ready to strike. Just as the truck, with a confused clamor of noise, passed the house, she put forth all her strength and struck. A shower of glass fell about her, and the fresh night air rushed into the close musty cellar. She felt a sharp jab of pain in her arm, but her blow had broken the glass and the greater part of the framework. Without waiting to think of possible injuries or risks she struck again with the heavy bar and the rest of the slender framework gave way. She drew herself up to the sill then and crawled out into the areaway. She heard no sound of pursuing footsteps, and slipped quickly and softly along in the shadow, gained the next house, then the next.

She glanced back and saw no evidence of pursuit, and hurried on. Now she was in the radius of one of the infrequent street lamps. Her own house was only three blocks away, but it occurred to her that she should have turned in the other direction where the street was darker. Suddenly she heard a peremptory voice behind her, "Hello there! Where are you going?" and turning she found herself face to face with a policeman. His practiced gaze took in her hatless disordered condition and noted the blood streaming from her arm.

"Where are you going, miss?" he inquired drily. "You seem to have been in trouble, and you're in a bit of a hurry. Tell me about it."

Inez looked up in the officer's face and her knees began to tremble. He was not the kindly type of policeman, skeptical rather than humane. She had a horrible vision of the station-house, a possible night in jail, discovery and disgrace.

"I—I cut myself on some broken glass," she said. "I was going to the druggist to get fixed. It feels as if there might be some glass sticking in the cut." Her hasty explanation—the first that occurred to her—proved fairly fortunate. It is the custom in many humble neighborhoods to use the druggist as a doctor for minor ills and accidents.

"H'm," said the policeman, looking her over again. "Live near here?"

"A few blocks away," said Inez. Her arm was beginning to throb painfully. She felt suddenly beaten, indifferent. The policeman gave her a sharper scrutiny and turned his flash-light over her person. Something glittering in her hair caught his attention. He held the lantern high, close to her head, removed the glittering object, and found it to be a bit of glass. He looked in her face again and saw that it was not one that suggested acquaintance with scenes of violence. He lowered his light.

"Go 'long," he said, "and let the druggist fix you up," and he went his way.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE RACK.

IT was after eleven o'clock when Preston finally left Warren at the hospital. The surgeon's examination had corroborated his, and he felt a great sense of relief that the tragedy had not had graver consequences.

He went as rapidly as his taxi could carry him to the house in Duncan Street. The hour was late, and the landlady after a long delay and a prolonged tussle with bolts and keys, appeared at the door clad in a flannel kimona.

"Miss Slade is not in," she said. "She went out after dinner and has not come back."

"Are you sure—may I ask you to look?" urged Preston. "It is a very serious matter or I shouldn't ask it of you."

The landlady after looking as if about to refuse, turned and went upstairs. She returned after a few minutes. "She's not there," she said. "I opened her door and looked in. The room is empty."

Terribly disturbed, Preston went directly to the house of the Italian, Guiseppe Tugarone. Although it was late, he saw a light in the window of the room his patient had occupied. The man who had called for him to attend the woman came to the door, which he only opened a crack.

"Naw, naw, lady not here," he said in answer to Preston's inquiry, and prepared to close the door, but Preston got his foot in the crack.

"Come, come, I took her here myself, to the door of your cellar," he said. "I know she's here."

The Italian shook his head. "Lady no here," he said, and then with a savage grimace he gave Preston's foot a sudden sharp kick which caused him involntarily to withdraw it, then closed the door and locked it in his face.

"I'll call the police," said Preston standing close to the door.

The Italian's voice came back to him, apparently emanating from the keyhole. "No, you don't. Lady don't want police to know," said the voice.

Then he heard the sound of retreating footsteps.

More alarmed than ever Preston went to the gambling house next door, and rang the bell. The Greek boy who opened it looked at him doubtfully, but finally decided to admit him. Preston asked for Marinelli who came after a moment and stood just inside the threshold, aloof and indifferent, while Preston told his story. When he had finished Marinelli shrugged.

"I don't know," he said. "Gentleman—one of our patrons—take great fancy to that lady. Perhaps he wait outside and ask her go in his cab when she came out of Guiseppe's door."

"She wouldn't have gone with him," said Preston angrily. Marinelli's only answer was a shrug. "I want you to go and talk to that damned dago next door and tell him he's got to give her up," said Preston. Marinelli looked at him and said nothing. "If you don't I'll call the police," said Preston.

Marinelli smiled and twisted his moustache. Preston could have murdered him.

"Neither you or that dago next door are particularly anxious to have a call from the police," he added in a threatening tone.

Marinelli turned to leave, his air was one of great boredom. "Neither is lady anxious to have me give her story to newspaper reporter," he said. "Her name is not Slade, the name she give here. The gentleman who shot himself called her another name. She is good customer. I don't

like to make trouble for her, but Guiseppe my friend. You tell police to come here, go there" the Italian's head moved in rhythm with his statements, " Marinelli tell reporter long story. And nothing here for police to find—" he added. " This is quiet gentlemen's lodging-house." He smiled.

" You damned scoundrel," said Preston.

Marinelli bowed as if acknowledging a compliment and left his caller without a host. Preston walked slowly toward the door almost beside himself, not knowing what to do next. In the hall he felt someone pull his sleeve and looked down to see the Greek boy, George.

" I tell you something about your lady," whispered the boy. In response to the unspoken suggestion Preston put a bill in the boy's hand. " Vera dark gentleman Kellner crazy about Miss Slade. She no speak to him. He watch her go down to cellar. He run round to front door and give Guiseppe money to buy her with. Guiseppe promise to lock her in, and bimeby let him take her."

" Good God!" said Preston.

" She there all right," said George. " I watch from glass door. But—any minute mebbe—Kellner call in auto. I go off duty now. You pay me and I watch from front door. You go in alley and watch service entrance. Then when taxi drive up and tall thin dark man get out—big black eyes—look kinder hungry—you know him when you see him—then you catch her quick!"

Another bill found his way to George's pocket and Preston wild with anxiety started to follow him to the service alley where tradesmen had delivered their wares in the days when the South End was the abode of the prosperous and respectable Bostonian.

" Got a gun?" George asked him as he held open the door for him. Preston started to say no, then remembered that when he had taken the revolver from Warren's unconscious hand he had dropped it into his own pocket. He felt for it and found it.

" May need it," said George sagely. " Kellner want lady vera bad. He fight hard maybe." George seemed to relish this idea.

A sick shudder passed through Preston at those words. Too well he knew the power of a woman like Inez to sway a man's imagination.

He placed himself in a dark corner of the alley and waited. For an hour perhaps—it seemed a lifetime of hell—he waited; then the chug of a motor approaching caught his straining ears—yes, it was turning into the narrow road where he stood. He drew further back into the shadow, fairly holding his breath. The car stopped within a few feet of him and a man answering George's description got out and rang the service bell. Almost immediately Guiseppe opened it. The two men held a rapid low-voiced conversation that Preston could not catch, but he saw that they both became very much excited. Finally he heard Guiseppe exclaim angrily with gestures, " Don' know—don'ta know I tell you—" then turning he went into the house and slammed the door. The man after a moment re-entered the cab and drove away. Preston caught a glimpse of his white balked face and flaming eyes.

What could have happened, Preston asked himself. He went around to the front of the house and rang the bell. After a moment he heard cautious footsteps in the hall and the door was opened a crack. This time Preston inserted his stick in the door.

" You let that lady out at once or I'll call the police," said Preston.

To his surprise the man opened the door wide until all of his grinning face was visible. " Sure! Call 'em in," he said. " Think I see a cop downa the street now. Want me call him?"

Preston looked at the man sharply and saw that his remark was not bravado. Evidently Inez was not in his house.

He turned away with another threat which only made the Italian grim more widely, and when he heard the door close he went down in the areaway of the next house where George was posted.

" She don't come yet," said George.

Preston told the boy what had happened. " She got out some way," the Greek said, " while we were talking. Or else mebbe she fight back and Guiseppe croak her."

The suggestion turned Preston sick and

faint. The sight of his agitation evidently moved the boy's not too susceptible feelings.

"I guess she get away all right," he suggested. "She smart American girl—not afraid of wop like Guiseppe."

"You let me know if you hear anything," said Preston, and gave the boy his telephone number.

After a sleepless night spent in combating pictures of unspeakable horror, Preston rose so early that even his aunt, a keeper of severe New England rising hours, was just coming down to breakfast as she saw him going out the door.

"I shall probably not be back in time for my office hours, aunt," he said. "If any patients come or call up tell them I don't know when I shall be back."

His aunt, being a wise woman, adapted to the ways of men although a spinster, replied merely: "Very well, Edward."

CHAPTER XIII.

A BROKEN FLOWER.

PRESTON went first to the house in Duncan Street. The elderly landlady came to the door.

"I haven't seen Miss Slade this morning," she said. "I don't think she's back yet." Preston's heart sank. Something in his face must have touched the woman for she added: "Of course I have no idea when she comes in and out. She has her key. She comes and goes and leaves no address, but she pays regular. She may be back any minute."

Preston turned from the door and walked slowly along the street, wondering what to do next. He turned a corner, and there coming out of the door of a dairy restaurant he saw Inez!

He rushed up to her. "Inez, Inez," he cried, "I have been almost out of my mind! What happened to you?"

She was very pale and looked at him with a strange expression in her eyes.

"Arthur," she said, "how is he? I couldn't get any information over the telephone this morning. Have you heard?" He shook his head.

Indeed he had forgotten all about Warren. "I haven't remembered anything but you," he said. "But I can get authentic information for you right now, if that is what is troubling you — but first for Heaven's sake tell me about yourself—"

She shook her head. "I am all right. Tell me about Arthur first."

She did love the boy then after all. That fact stabbed him with an absolute sense of certainty. The tragedy of the night before had made the truth clear to her.

Preston went into the first drug-store they passed and telephoned to the hospital. He came out of the booth in a few minutes.

"He is doing very well," he reported, "practically out of danger." Inez rose from the chair by the soda-fountain into which she had dropped. The look on her face alarmed him. "Have you had your breakfast?" he asked.

"I've had a cup of coffee," she said. Then noticing that the drug-store clerk was drinking in their conversation Preston drew her out of the store.

"We must get a cab at once," he said, "you are not able to walk."

"I have been walking half the night," said Inez. "I am just beginning to know that I am tired."

Had it hit her as hard as all that, thought Preston bitterly, then he caught sight of a cab drawn by a dejected-looking horse and signaled it. The cabman drew up to the curb and Preston held out his hand to Inez. "Come," he said.

Inez hesitated a moment, then evidently too weary to resist, entered the cab. Inside she sank back against the cushions in utter collapse. Preston saw that she was shaking from head to foot.

"You are sure Arthur won't die?" she asked.

"Practically sure," said Preston. He turned and looked at her. "So you are in love with him after all."

She shook her head, the tear-drops trickled down from under her shut eyes and the sight went to Preston's heart. "No; but if he had died I should feel as if I had killed him," she said in a broken voice.

"But he tried to kill you," said Preston.

"I wish he had," Inez said.

After the long strain of the night Preston's nerves were under bad control. "I suppose after he is patched up again, you will marry him," he said in a sudden outburst of jealousy.

"He doesn't want to marry me now," said Inez. The answer did not reassure him.

"Oh, he will feel differently when he is normal again," said Preston in the tone of one wishing to give reassurance.

Then when he saw her lying there like a broken flower, so obviously at the end of her endurance, jealousy gave place to tenderness.

"You poor child," he said, and put his strong hand over hers, but she drew it back as if the contact scorched her. "Did you have a horrible time last night? You haven't told me."

"It came near being pretty horrible," she said, "but I escaped."

Then in a few words she told him of her experience with the Italian and her escape.

"How did you happen to be walking past just at the moment that Arthur was shot?" she asked.

"I followed you from Cambridge," said Preston. "When I saw the direction you were taking I felt sure where you were going, but I lost you at the transfer station. I was walking past the house, wondering what would be the best way to get a message to you, when I heard the shot." Inez shuddered. "Why were *you* walking all night? Where were you?" asked Preston, no longer able to control his anxiety.

"Looking for the hospital where you had taken Arthur," she said. "I went to three before I found it. Then I waited to hear the result of their examination."

"Was I still there?" Preston asked.

"I don't know, I think not," answered Inez weakly. "I didn't ask."

"Didn't ask!" exclaimed Preston, cut to the heart.

"You see, I didn't think of anything but that one thing—if Arthur should die I would be responsible," Inez explained.

"But that is nonsense," said Preston, too wounded to be sympathetic. "The man first tried to kill you, then himself. I don't see what material you have there for working yourself up into an hysterical sense of responsibility. How did it happen anyway?" He waited but she did not speak. "I suppose he found you there," he said, then felt a stab of self-reproach when he saw how she winced.

"It was the shock of finding out what the girl he loved was like," said Inez bitterly, "the girl he had so idealized that she had been able to reform him—"

"He had been drinking," said Preston. "That was part of it, of course."

"He thought that I was—" she hesitated, "disreputable—finding me in that place. He said he didn't believe that I went there just to gamble."

"Inez, dear," exclaimed Preston, "it is so terrible to think of your putting yourself in such positions—running the risk of social ruin, rubbing elbows with the sort of people who come to these places; running the constant risk of discovery if no worse; you say the men who go there never annoy you but you had a very narrow escape last night. I thought — I hoped — you were cured by the shock of your father's death."

"I don't know what started me off this time," she said, "but I think it was because I was so unhappy."

"About your father?" he asked gently.

She shook her head. "About myself, and about you," she said.

"About me! I don't understand."

The cab was approaching her door. As it turned under a street light he caught a glimpse of her face. Something in the expression caught at him sharply like a pain. The cab stopped at her door. She put her hand on the door handle.

"You are strangely blind, Edward Preston," she said, "if you have never guessed that I love you. But I will never marry you."

Then before Preston could restrain her, or the cabman descend stiffly from his seat, she had pushed open the cab door and was half-way up the path before he had overtaken her.

"Inez," he said, "don't leave me like this," but she hurried on without answering him, opened the street-door—unlatched as Cambridge houses may be in the daytime—and slipped in, leaving him face to face with an irate cabman.

"One dollar and sixty cents, please," said the cabman.

"Wait and take me home," said Preston, who seemed to be very much out of breath for so short a run. He flung himself into the cab again. He could not face a meeting with any one in that wild moment of chaotic emotion.

CHAPTER XIV.

"STILL THE DARK OF THE MOON."

HE tried to see Inez that evening and the next afternoon, but she refused him. Then he used strategy. He went to the door and asked to speak with Esther. The old woman came at once, looking a little frightened.

"Esther," he said, "I know about this moon fever Miss Inez suffers from, and I think I know a way to cure it if she will let me try, but she won't. She won't even see me. Can't you help me to see her? I know how devoted you are to her."

Esther looked up into his face. "Well, I know it's you that can help her if any one can," she said.

"Then you do as I tell you. Go to Miss Inez and tell her that some one is downstairs with a message from Mr. Warren that must be delivered personally. I will wait for her in the drawing-room. Don't tell her who it is."

"I'll do that, sir," said Esther after a minute. "Surely there can be no harm in that." She hobbled out and Preston saw her slowly clambering up the stairs.

He went into the darkest corner of the room and turned his back to the door, apparently examining with profound interest a steel engraving of George Washington and his family. After a minute he heard her light step on the stairs. She was half-way into the room before she recognized him, then she stood still and half turned as if to flee.

"You have played a trick on me," she said.

"No," said Preston, "not really. I have a message for you from Warren, but your treatment of me justifies any deception, I should say. Have you no consideration for me? Have you any conception of the way you have put me on the rack since I have known you?"

She paled and stood staring at him, her wide eyes filled with that strange pulsing light. Preston had an odd fancy of imprisoned wings beating in the blue depths of those eyes. He came nearer and she did not withdraw.

"I only seem to hurt people," she murmured. "I don't know why I have to keep on living."

"It would be very simple to make me insanely, idiotically happy instead of wretched," said Preston, but she shook her head.

"I couldn't marry a man like you," she said. "It was different with Arthur. In spite of that shameful mania—habit—whatever you choose to call it—of mine, and the lie I was living and all that, I knew I had pulled him out of worse things; and I thought if I could make him happy, be of real use to him—it sort of squared things up."

"Surely you are not expecting to marry him still," said Preston, frowning.

"I haven't thought about that," replied Inez with simplicity.

"What then have you been thinking of, if I may ask?"

She looked directly into his eyes. "You," she said.

He paled and took a step toward her, but stopped as he saw her move backward.

"What is the message from Arthur?" she asked.

"He wants to see you if you are willing to go to him."

Inez smiled in spite of her tense mood. "Is that all?" she asked.

"All except your answer."

"I will go at any time you suggest."

Preston told her the hospital hours.

"Please go now, Edward," she said, "you would if you knew what you are making me go through by staying and talking this way."

"It sounds like rather unnecessary suffering," he said. "If it were less hard on me I should call it nonsense."

"Call it what you like," she said. "It's real to me."

Preston picked up his hat. "Am I an eternal outcast from your presence?" he asked. "Am I to suffer this ostracization forever?"

He saw her breast rise and fall and her eyes darken as if she were on the verge of tears, but she did not weep. She stood looking at him a moment, then she said: "Wait just a little longer. Don't make me answer things yet."

With that he was obliged to be content.

The next day Inez went to see Arthur Warren. She found a very pale and remorseful Arthur propped up on his pillows, looking more like the ill-starred Edgar Allan Poe than ever.

"I want your forgiveness, Inez," he said. "That is all I have the right to ask now. I can't expect you to marry a man who has tried to take your life. But—I want you to know I don't believe the dreadful thing I said that night. When I began to think, I knew it couldn't be true; and since then Preston has explained things to me."

Inez looked down. "I am glad you understand, Arthur. I am terribly ashamed of myself, of course, but I should hate to have you think that I am any worse than I am."

He looked at her yearningly and looked away with a sigh. "I believe my jealousy was well-founded," he said. "I think you do love Preston."

Her answering flush would have made denial useless, but she had no wish to deny. "Yes, I love him," she said.

"Was it because of me that you wouldn't let yourself listen to him?"

Inez turned her face away. "Only partly," she said.

Warren was silent a long time. Perhaps his terrible experience had given a moment of clear vision, and doubtless it had served to raise him above the storm and stress of his emotions.

"Well, now that that reason doesn't exist any more, why won't you give him a show?" he said.

"I don't think I ought to," said Inez.

He smiled. "A relic of puritanism, Inez," said Warren. "Sheer nonsense. You love each other; for Heaven's sake take each other and have all the happiness you can. I am going away to try to forget you, and I'm going to try to keep straight, and I hope you'll marry Preston." He faltered a moment, then added bravely: "I think you were made for each other."

But the girl rose quickly, as if to cut short a painful subject.

"I must say good-by now, Arthur. Do you want me to come again?"

He hesitated, then shook his head. "Better not, I guess. You see you aren't one of the women men can love wisely. You're the kind we love too much."

"I don't deserve any of it," said Inez brokenly.

That evening Preston went to see Inez. Esther who opened the door looked delighted to see him.

"She's down at the end of the garden all alone," she said. "You can go right down."

Preston hesitated. "Perhaps I ought not to go again unannounced."

Esther nodded. "Yes; you'd ought. Besides I'm thinking she'll see you. Her mood has changed." Esther paused, then added in a whisper: "It's still the dark of moon, sir, when the evil rays are at work, and she's got that moon-look in her eyes."

Preston succumbed to temptation.

He found Inez at the foot of the garden seated in the shadow of Aristides. "May I remain?" he said. "Or must I go away again?"

Unexpectedly she smiled. "No, you may stay," she said.

He sat down beside her and she began to talk at once of any and every subject. An almost feverish gaiety possessed her. Strange lights seemed to quiver in her eyes. She refused to talk seriously of anything.

Preston, letting her follow her mood, responded briefly and watched her, stirred, scarcely happy, yet grateful not to be shut out of her presence. He knew what old Esther meant by the "moon-look" in her eyes. It was that strange sense they gave one of pulsing light, that elusive flicker as of a cold blue flame. As she looked tonight it was easy to believe that Inez was indeed essentially different from other women, an elfin creature from another planet.

But as the twilight came and deepened

she grew quieter, falling at length into a long silence. Finally she looked up, all the lightness gone from her face, her gaiety fallen from her like a garment.

"I went to see Arthur to-day to say good-by. You know he is leaving for California to-morrow. He is going to China."

"Yes, I know," he said.

"Our engagement is broken. You knew that." He nodded. "You know if Arthur had died I meant to kill myself," she said; "as it is—I have come to another decision."

"To marry me," he suggested. She shook her head and rose.

"I am not going to tell you what it is," she said, "not yet. Perhaps I never shall. And now I want you to go."

"Must I?" he said.

He took her hand and suddenly uncontrollably crushed it in his, kissed it, then dropped it and turned to go, but with that movement found her in his arms, her hands slipping up his cheek to his hair, while her eyes looking deep into his, again held in their depths that pulsing beat of wings.

"I love you, Edward," she said slowly and softly. "I love you very much." And then deliberately, without coquetry or shyness, she kissed him on the lips. Intense emotions long held in leash broke loose in the man's nature, and for a moment she let him have his will, responding with a curious still passion to his kisses. Then with a shiver she drew herself from his arms.

"Go now, Edward—you must."

The next morning he had a brief note from her.

When you receive this I will be gone. You may be able to find me, but I ask you not to try. If you love me you will do as I ask. If you should find me before it is my wish to come back it will not add to your happiness or mine. I shall not be in Boston, and I shall come back. Do not try to follow me. Remember—it is the dark of the moon. INEZ.

CHAPTER XV.

"ARRANT NONSENSE."

PRESTON went through a dozen wild moods in the course of that morning. Inez's confession of love for him, the memory of her kisses, had increased his longing to see her a thousandfold, yet he hesitated to go against the request expressed in her letter.

Had she given way to her gambling passion again, only seeking some new resort since the place in the South End was no longer safe? Was the mania as persistent as that after her last terrible experience—so soon after it?

He felt a chill of revulsion at the thought, yet the next moment the memory of her kiss and her slow words—"I love you, Edward, I love you very much"—made his heart beat and his senses swim.

In the end he decided not to make any effort to find her. A week passed, and then another and Inez did not return and did not write again. He had moments of terrible uneasiness. It did not need the memory of such experiences as the girl had already had to suggest the dangers of her position, if she had indeed given way again to the promptings of her "moon fever." Since he was powerless to do anything he tried not to think of it, but his patients said that the doctor was not looking well, and his aunt for the first time in her knowledge of him found him irritable.

In the third week of Inez's absence one Louisa Renshaw, a spinster friend of his aunt's, came to visit them. She was a plump pleasant person with a hobby. The hobby was astrology. Preston heard what seemed a most extraordinary chatter of nonsense as she talked with his aunt around the evening lamp. Greatly to his surprise his aunt seemed to understand her visitor's strange jargon.

"Why, aunt, what do *you* know about the evil influence of Saturn, and the beneficent influence of Venus?" he exclaimed, "and when, pray, did you become so wise about the occult meaning of planetary conjunctions?"

His aunt laughed. "Louisa has lent me some books," she said. "Besides—there are lots of things I know that you don't suspect."

Preston laughed, and his aunt turned her attention to Louisa, who was describing the case of an acquaintance of hers in terms of astrology.

"It was a very curious case of lunar in-

fluence," Louisa Renshaw was saying. "She had the moon rising in Cancer with Neptune in the Seventh House. That was the cause of her delusions. It was a curious case of moon influence."

The last words attracted Preston's attention "You really believe that, do you?" he said to Miss Renshaw.

"Of course," responded the amateur astrologer, who was pleasantly combining astrological discourse with the knitting of a sweater.

"You believe then," pursued Preston, "that an influence of the moon could cause a child to run away at a certain time each month and create a passion for gambling in a person?"

"Given a certain combination of aspects —of course," said Louisa Renshaw. "Some very curious passions are created by the moon—imaginative obsessions, so to speak. You see games of chance are ruled by the moon, so is the quality of imagination. Neptune also enters in. In combination with moon aspects it can produce poets, drug fiends, highly imaginative musicians and painters, psychics, lunatics—all according to the exact nature of the aspects at birth and those formed progressively in the chart."

"Afraid I am getting a little out of my depth," laughed Preston, "but I'm interested. Then in your belief such a mania—we will call it that—"

"It amounts to that," said the astrologer, picking up a dropped stitch.

"Such a mania could recur each month at a certain period of the moon?" Preston continued.

"It *would*," asserted the astrologer. There was an interval while she counted stitches, then she reversed her needles and let her work rest in her lap. "Tell me about the case you have in mind, if you care to. Perhaps I can elucidate it a little. Astrology and medicine are divorced now, but once, you know, they were wedded."

"I know," laughed Preston, then his smile faded. "It is a case of a young patient of mine," he said evasively. "The thing seems to have taken a curious hold upon her—almost like alcohol or a drug—in that she can't seem to resist the promptings when they come. Even during a case of serious illness in the family, with some one she loved almost at the point of death, she ran away to indulge in it."

The astrologer resumed her knitting. "Perfectly understandable," she said. "It is a sort of abnormal excitation of the imagination that demands some intense form of *mental* excitement. The lunar influence causing that would never, in any case, create the kind of craving that causes people to take drugs. If that girl were a man and a soldier, living a life under the pressure of some tension or activity, the chances are that she would never have turned to gambling."

"Why, that is what an alienist said!" exclaimed Preston.

Miss Renshaw nodded triumphantly. "I told you that astrology and medical science were twins," she said.

Preston laughed. "No, the last time you said the relationship was marital, not fraternal," he said. Then he became thoughtful. "It certainly is curious."

"Do you know the date of her birth?" Miss Renshaw inquired with a professional expression. Preston shook his head. "If you did, I could tell you more about it—the probable chances and nature of her cure. There wouldn't be anything dishonorable about it, because, you see, I don't know who she is, and you would be working with me professionally." Louisa's eyes twinkled.

But she did not take her hobby so seriously that she was unaware of the disrepute in which it was commonly held.

"I might find out," said Preston, while his aunt regarded him with round eyes of amazement.

"She is probably a very strong person physically—the kind we call very much alive," Louisa Renshaw continued. "Isn't she?"

"Yes, she is," assented Preston. "Why did you think that?"

"Assuming a probable position of Mars which would cause it to be the craving of a strong vitality, not of an abnormal nervous system," said Miss Renshaw. "And if the girl lived an active life, with her emotional nature satisfied and with her time suffi-

ciently occupied, she would undoubtedly get over it—although there would always be some tendency to a craving for adventure or excitement when a certain aspect was formed during the dark of the moon."

"I see," said Preston. "It is very interesting."

Louisa Renshaw looked up, her glasses crookedly astride her nose and smiled benignly. "Who knows—I may have made a convert," she said.

The next day Preston was called to see a patient at Radcliffe. The girl, who was a freshman, and had only been there a few weeks, was so seriously ill that the doctor advised notifying her parents at once. And as she was unconscious and unable to give her address, the college record, which contained the data of her matriculation, was referred to. The registrar chanced to leave the book open before Preston, and another entry caught his attention. The book was arranged alphabetically. The sick girl's name began with an M, and directly over it was the name of Inez May. He recalled that Inez had once told him that she had gone to Radcliffe for two years, but had left with her course unfinished shortly before he met her.

He read the date of her birth mechanically, then remembered Louisa Renshaw, and after a moment's hesitation copied it on a piece of paper.

That day at lunch he gave his memorandum to Louisa Renshaw.

"But I can't do it very exactly without knowing the hour of her birth," said Louisa. "I suppose you couldn't find that out?"

"I might," said Preston, recalling Esther, who had, he knew, been Inez's mother's maid before her marriage.

That afternoon Preston made an excuse for stopping at the Mays house to have a little talk with Esther. As soon as he got home he carried his information to Louisa Renshaw.

"She was born at exactly six o'clock in the morning," he said.

"Good!" said Louisa. "I will go to my room and work it out exactly for you."

When Preston came out on the side veranda dressed for dinner he found Louisa in pale-gray silk, seated in a rocking-chair placidly rocking and watching robins on the lawn. She looked up with a smile as he joined her.

"Our moon runaway can be cured," she said, "and will, if a formation indicated about this time takes place." Preston walked to the piazza rail so that his face did not lie directly in Louisa's line of vision. "That seems odd," he said, trying to speak naturally; "how do you make it out? Some person—"

"Some person that should have come into her life when the sun was in Cancer this very year."

"When would that have been?" Preston asked.

"Some time between the middle of June and the same time in July," replied Louisa.

Preston felt a flush rising to his cheek and hoped the astute astrologer did not notice it.

"That person," Louisa pursued, "should be a man born in Sagitarius."

"And when would *that* be?" asked Preston.

"Some time between November 18 and the same date in December," replied Louisa promptly. Then Preston rudely turned his back upon her, overcome with the consciousnes that his birthday was on December 6.

Then his aunt appeared at the door leading to the porch. "Dinner is served," she said.

"Of course it is probably arrant nonsense," the physician told himself, but in spite of that fact he felt most illogically cheered by the predictions of Louisa Renshaw.

CHAPTER XVI.

"MY MOON-ROSE."

THE days passed and still Preston had no word from Inez, and still he refrained, in spite of his well-nigh uncontrollable longing to see her, from going in search of her. Then one afternoon, nearly four weeks after her departure, his aunt met him at the door with a thrilling piece of information.

"Miss May has been here to see you,"

she said. "She did not give me any message, but she said that she left it on your desk."

Without stopping for any sort of answer, Preston hurried into his office. What he saw caused his heart to give a great leap: no letter or written message was on his desk, but a rose of palest gold, the one Inez had called a moon rose—yet this was not the month of roses.

Preston reached out for his telephone and called Inez's number. He waited with an irregularly beating heart, more than half expecting her to refuse to speak to him, but in a minute he heard her voice, the low, delicious, unmistakable voice he loved.

"Yes, Dr. Preston," it said.

"Am I still an exile?" Preston asked.

"No," said the voice. "When do you want to come?"

"This minute," said Preston. He heard her low laugh.

"Not quite as soon as that—but I shall be at home, if you want to come about four o'clock this afternoon."

"That doesn't need any answer," said Preston.

"There might be a dying patient," suggested Inez.

"It would have to die," said Preston.

"What a conscienceless physician—"

"I didn't know that moon roses bloomed in October," said Preston.

"They don't," said Inez. "It's a miracle."

"What does it mean?" asked Preston, and with something that came to his consciousness like a waft of perfume on a warm wind the voice replied:

"I'll tell you this afternoon." Then he heard the click of her receiver. He looked up to see his aunt in the doorway.

"Lunch is ready," she said. "I told you before, but you didn't seem to hear me." Then Preston looked up at her, and though his aunt was a spinster, she knew what that look meant.

"They won't want me, of course," was aunt's first reflection, "but I might go to Louisa Renshaw. She has always wanted me to stay with her."

It seemed to Preston as if four o'clock would never come. As he entered the big drawing-room Inez was sitting by a wood fire waiting, but the window facing the garden was open. Inez wore a shimmering cream-colored gown. She rose to meet him.

He took both hands and held her a distance. "My moon rose," he said, and was about to gather her into his arms, but she held him back, looking into his eyes with the pulsing light of wings in hers.

"Wait until I have told you what I want to say," she said.

"Must I?" he whispered. She nodded and sank down upon the wide old-fashioned sofa. He sat beside her and, leaning back, looked his fill.

"Do you know where I went, Edward?" she asked.

"You asked me not to try to find out," he said.

She smiled faintly. "But in my heart I hoped you would. When you didn't, I began to be afraid that you had, after all, come to despise me, that you had stopped loving me." She raised her hand to forbid his wordless answer to this with another: "Wait."

"Don't make me wait too long," said Preston.

Her eyes fell before the ardor of his, but she went on: "I went to New York. I know of a place there like Marinelli's—a safe place. It was the time of the moon when the fever usually seizes me. I believed that what I felt for you was so much stronger than anything I had ever felt before or dreamed of feeling—that it would conquer that queer craving. That was why I let you kiss me as you did that last night. I wanted to fill myself with the sense of you—then go somewhere where the temptation was right within reach, and see if I still craved the sensation of the roulette table—" She paused.

"Inez," said Preston breathlessly. He put out his hand and captured hers, pressing it down with tremulous strength. She turned toward him, a laugh of love and happiness in her throat.

"I couldn't think about anything but you, Edward," she said. "I wanted to see you so that I couldn't think of anything else at all." Then she gave herself to his embrace.

After a time he drew back a little and put her from him.

"I want to look at you," he said. "I want to be sure that it is you, my own dear love—"

"So you see I am cured forever," said Inez.

"Probably," said Preston. "Although an astrologer has warned me that I may have to provide some special form of entertainment for you in the dark of the moon, especially when it is in Cancer."

"Edward Preston, what are you talking about?" she exclaimed.

"Didn't you know," said Preston, "that formerly the practise of medicine was allied with that of astrology? They were once wedded, but now they are divorced—or, if you prefer it, they are twins."

"Are you losing your mind?" inquired Inez.

He drew her strongly back into his arms. "If I am, it is happiness that has turned my head."

(The end.)

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INCONSISTENCY

BY MELBA PARKER

ISN'T it
A fact
You can't please
A woman?

Last night she said,
"You never show me those
Little attentions
Any more
Like you used to
Before
We were married.
That's just like
A man!"
And she cried
Awhile.

So to-night
I stopped and got
Two seats
At a good show,
Some candy, and a
Box of flowers;
But all she said
Was,
"All you do is spend
Money.
I'm the only one who ever
Tries to save
A cent.
That's just like
A man!"
And then she cried
Some more.

You simply can't
Please a woman!

The Flying Legion

by George Allan England

Author of "Cursed," "The Shyster-at-Law," "The Brass Check," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

WEARIED by civilian life after years of service as an "ace" flyer in the great war, an ex-officer, known as the "Master," with the help of a comrade, Major Bohannan, organized the "Flying Legion," composed of thirty flying officers of various nationalities who had rendered distinguished service in the war, and were men of independent means, who agreed to serve without pay and to accept the Master's word as law.

The destination and purpose of the expedition were unknown to the members of the Legion. But the Master had a definite undertaking in mind—he was interested in the interior of Arabia, from which Christians are barred. His Arabian servant, Rrisa, whose life he had saved in battle, answered a few questions about the country and agreed—unwillingly—to accompany the expedition, provided that he was not asked to betray the secrets of his religion. From him the Master extracted information as to the whereabouts in Mecca of the sacred Black Stone, revered by all Islam.

While the meeting to organize the Legion was being held an uninvited recruit appeared—Captain Alden, formerly a R. A. F. ace, who wore a celluloid mask that he refused to remove, saying that he had been horribly wounded. He was accepted.

A super-airplane was being built near New York, and the Legion captured it, the Master having made arrangements for payment to be made to its owners after the Legion was on its journey. In a fight with guards Captain Alden was wounded in the arm. The Master christened the plane "Nissr"—the Eagle. The giant plane was equipped with ultra-modern appliances, and was so large that smaller planes could land on its upper-dock.

Shortly after the start a stowaway was discovered, still unconscious from lethal gas—probably a member of the plane's original crew. The Master declared that Kloof, whose carelessness was responsible for his presence, should suffer.

Through "his" wound the Master learned that "Captain Alden" was a woman who had served through the great war as a man. She begged to be allowed to stay with the expedition, but the Master told her that she would have to leave when they reached land. Yet he was greatly impressed by her, and thoughts of her made him uneasy.

The International Air Board had learned of the capture of Nissr, and had despatched a large number of planes from the Azores to arrest the members of the Legion. But by means of vibrations generated by an invention of the Master's they were sent fluttering down. Later a single plane appeared and was allowed to land on Nissr. Its pilot was Leclair, a famous French ace, who told the Master that he was under arrest for piracy. The Master made him helpless by the use of vibrations, and then gave him a chance to join the Legion, which the Frenchman accepted.

Just after the coast of Africa was sighted there was a burst of flame from the stern of the air-liner. The stowaway had set fire to the fuel-tanks. Pistol in hand, and howling curses, the stowaway started for the Master. Just then "Captain Alden," who had been under arrest, appeared in the companionway.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"CAPTAIN ALDEN" MAKES GOOD.

THE crash of shattered glass mingled with the volley flung by the murderously-spitting automatic of the stowaway. From the forward companion, at the top of the ladder, "Captain Alden" fired—one shot only.

No second shot was needed. For the attacker, grunting, lunged forward, fell prone, sprawled on the down-slanting plates of the take-off platform. His pistol skidded away, clattering, over the buffed metal.

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

"As neat a shot as the other's was bad," calmly remarked the Master, brushing from his sleeve some glittering splinters of glass. A lurch of Nissr threw him against the rail. He had to steady himself there, a moment. Down his cheek, a trickle of blood serpented. "Yes, rather neat," he approved.

He felt something warm on his face, put up his hand and inspected red fingers.

"Hm! A sliver must have cut me," said he, and dismissed it wholly from his mind.

Major Bohannan, with chromatic profanity, ran from the gallery. "Captain Alden" drew herself up the top rounds of the ladder, emerged wholly from the companion and likewise started for the wounded interloper. Both, as they ran toward the fallen man, zigzagged with the pitch and yaw of the stricken airship, slipped on the plates, staggered up the incline.

And others, from the aft companion, now came running with cries, their bodies backgrounded by the leaping flames and smoke that formed a wake behind the wounded Eagle of the Sky.

Before the major and Alden could reach the stowaway, he rallied. Up to hands and knees he struggled. He dragged himself away to starboard. Trailing blood, he scrambled to the rail.

The major snatched his revolver from its holster. Up came the "captain's" gun, once more.

"No, no!" the Master shouted, stung into sudden activity. "Not that! Alive—take him alive!"

The stowaway's answer was a laugh of wild derision; a hideous, shrill, tremulous laugh that rose in a kind of devilish mockery on the air of that high level. For just a second the man hung there, swaying, at the rail. Beyond him, up the tilt of the falling Nissr, brighter flames whipped back. Came a burst of smoke, another concussion, a shuddering impact that trembled through the whole vast airliner. White-hot fire ribboned back and away, shredded into little, whirling gusts of incandescence that dissolved in black smoke.

"Take me alive, eh?" the stowaway shouted, madly. "Ha-ha! I see you! You're all dead men, anyhow! I'll go first—show you I'm not afraid!"

With astonishing agility he leaped. Hands on rail, with a last supreme burst of the energy that inervated his dying body, he vaulted clear. Out and away he hurled himself. Emptiness of space gathered him to its dizzy, vacant horror.

The Master, quite unmindful of the quickening blood-stream down his face and neck, peered sharply—as if impersonally interested in some problem of ballistics—at the spinning, gyrating figure that with grotesque contortions plummeted the depths.

Over and over, whirling with outflung arms and legs, dropped the stowaway. Down though Nissr herself was plunging, he fell faster. Swiftly his body dwindled, shrinking to a dwarf, an ant-like thing, a black dot. Far below on the steely sea-plain, a tiny bubble of white leaped out, then faded. That pinpoint of foam was the stowaway's grave.

"Very good," approved the Master, unmoved. He lurched against the rail, as a sudden manoeuvre of the pilot somewhat flattened out the airliner's fall. The helicopters began to turn, to buzz, to roar into furious activity, seeking to check the plunge. The major came staggering back. But quicker than he, "Captain Alden" was at the Master's side.

"He shot you?" the woman cried, pointing.

"Bah! A splinter of glass!" And the Master shook off the blood with a twitch of his head. "That was a neat bull's-eye you made on him, captain. It saves you from punishment for forgetting you were under arrest; for climbing the ladder and coming above-decks. Yes—I've got to rescind my order. You're at liberty. And—"

"And I stay with the expedition, sir?" demanded Alden, her hand going out in an involuntary gesture of appeal. For the first time, she was showing eagerness of a feminine sort. But she suppressed it, instantly, and stood at attention. "If I have done you a service, sir, reward with by letting me stay!"

"I will see. There may be no expedition to stay with. Now—"

"Life-belts, sir? And take to the small 'planes?" came a voice from the companion-

way. The face of Manderson—of him who had found the stowaway—appeared there. Manderson looked anxious, a trifle pale. Aft, more figures were appearing. In spite of the iron discipline of the Legion, signs of disorder were becoming evident. "We're hard hit, sir," Manderson reported. "Every man for himself, now? Orders, sir?"

"My orders are, every man back to his post!" cried the Master, his voice a trumpet-call of resolution. "There'll be no *sauve qui peut*, here!" He laid a hand on the butt of his pistol. "Back, every man of you!"

Came another dull, jarring explosion. Nissr reeled to port. The legionaries trickled down the companion-ladders. From somewhere below a cry rose: "The aft starboard float—it's gone! And the stabilizer—!"

Confused sounds echoed. Nissr sagged drunkenly, lost headway and yawed off her course, turning slowly in the thin, cold air. Her propellors had been shut off; all the power of her remaining engines had now been clutched into the helicopter-drive.

The Master, impersonally smearing off the blood from his neck, made his way toward the forward companion. He had to hold the rail with one hand, for now the metal plates of the observation-gallery were sharply canted. Nissr had got wholly out of hand, so far as steerage-way was concerned; but the rate of her fall seemed to have been a trifle checked.

Alden and the major followed their chief to the companion. All three descended the ladder, which hung inward and away from them at a sharp angle. They reached the strangely inclined floor of the main corridor, and, bracing themselves against the port wall, worked their way aft.

Not all the admirable discipline of the Legion could prevent some confusion. Such of the men as were on duty in pilot-house, pits, wireless or engine-room were all sticking; but a number of off-duty legionaries were crowding into the main corridor. Among them the Master saw Leclair and Rrisa. No one showed fear. The white feather was not visible; but a grim tension had developed. Death, imminent, sobers the boldest.

From the engine-room, shouts, orders, were echoing. The engine-room door flung open. Smoke vomited—thick, choking, gray. Auchincloss reeled out, clutching at his throat.

"What chance?" the Master cried, staggering toward him.

"If—the fire spreads to the forward petrol-tanks, none!" choked the chief engineer. "Aft pit's flooded with blazing oil. Gorlitz—my God!"

"What about Gorlitz?"

"Burned alive—to a crisp! I've got four extinguishers at work. Two engines out of commission. Another only limping! And—"

He crumpled, suddenly, dropping to the metals. The Master saw through the clinging smoke, by the dimmed light of the frosted disks, that the skin of the engineer's face and hands was cooked to a char.

"If he's breathed flame—" began the major. Alden knelt beside him, peered closely, made a significant, eloquent gesture.

"Volunteers!" shouted the Master, plunging forward.

Into the fumes and smother, half a dozen men fought their way. From the bulkheads they snatched down the little fire-grenades. The Master went first. Bohannan was second, with Rrisa a close third. Leclair in his forward rush almost stumbled over Alden. The "Captain," masked and still unrecognized as a woman by any save the Master, was thrust back at the door by the Celt, as she too tried to enter.

"No, not you!" he shouted. "You, with only one arm—faith, it's worse than useless! Back, you!" Then he and many plunged into the blazing engine-room.

Thus they closed with the fire-devil now licking ravenous tongues about the vitals of Nissr.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOSTILE COASTS.

AN hour from that time, the airliner was drifting sideways at low altitudes, hardly five hundred feet above the waves. A sad spectacle she made, her wreckage gilded by the infinite splendors

of the sun now lowering toward the sea-horizon. Her helicopters were droning with all the power that could be flung into them from the crippled power-plant. Her propellors—some charred to mere stumps on their shafts—stood starkly motionless.

Oddly awry she hung, driven slowly eastward by the wind. Her rudder was burned clean off; her stern, warped, reeking with white fumes that drifted on the late afternoon air told of the fury that had blazed about her. Flames no longer roared away; but the teeth of their consuming rage had bitten deep. Where the aft observation-pit had been, now only a twisted net of metal-work remained, with all the plate-glass melted and cracked away. The body of Gorlitz, trapped there, had mercifully fallen into the sea. That ghastly thing, at any rate, no longer remained.

Four legionaries were in the pilot-house: the Master, Bohannan, Leclair and "Captain Alden." For the most part, they held silence. There was little for them to say. At length the major spoke.

"Still sagging down, eh?" he commented, his eyes on the needle of the altimeter. "Some situation! Two men dead and others injured. Engines crippled, propellors the same, and two floats so damaged we couldn't float if we came down. Well, by God!"

Leclair looked very grim.

"I regret only," said he in French, "that the stowaway escaped us. Ah, *la belle exécution,* if we had him now!"

The Master, at the starboard window, kept silence. No one sat at the wheel. Of what use could it have been? The Master was peering far to eastward, now with the naked eye, now sweeping the prospect with binoculars. He was studying the African coast, clearly in sight as a long, whitish line of sand with a whiter collar of foamy surf, fifteen miles away.

A few gulls had begun to show—strange, small gulls, yellow-beaked and swift. Off to northward, a native dhow was beating down-wind with full-bellied lateen sail, with matting over its hatches. Heat was beginning to grow intense, for no longer was Nissr making a gale that cooled; no longer was she at high, cold levels. Africa, the tropics, had suddenly become real; and the sudden contrast oppressed them all.

Through the shimmering, quivering air, an arid pallor extended up the eastern sky; a pale, milky illumination, dull-white over the desert, that told of the furnace into which Nissr was drifting—if indeed she could survive till she reached land. The glasses showed tawny reaches of sand, back a little from the coast; and beyond these, low hills, or rather rolling dunes, lay empurpled by vibrant heat-hazes.

"It won't be much like navigating over that hell-spot, three or four miles in the air," muttered Bohannan. He looked infinitely depressed. The way he gnawed at his reddish mustache showed how misadventure raveled his nerve.

No one answered him. Leclair lighted a cigarette, and silently squinted at Africa with eyes long inured to the sun of that land of flame. Alden, at the other window, kept silence, too. That masked face could express no emotion; but something in the sag of the woman's shoulders, the droop of her head, showed how profound was her suffering.

"Faith, are we going to make it, chief?" asked the major, impatiently. Not his the temperament that can wait in silence. He made a singular figure as he lounged there at the pilot-house window, huge elbows on the sill. One hand was wrapped in bandages, well-saturated with croton-oil. Chars and burns on his uniform showed where blazing petrol from the final explosion had spattered him.

His eyes, like the Master's, were bloodshot, inflamed. Part of his red crop of hair had been singed off, and all his eyelashes were gone, as well as half his bushy red brows. But the ugly set of his jaw, the savage gleam of his eyes showed that no physical pain was depressing him. His only trouble was the thought that perhaps the expedition of the Flying Legion had ended before it had really begun.

"What chance, sir?" he insisted. "It's damned bad, according to my way of thinking."

"What you think and what you say won't have any weight with this problem of aerial flotation," the Master curtly retorted.

"If we make land, we make it, that's all, sir." He relapsed into silence. Leclair muttered, in Arabic—his words audible only to himself—an ancient Islamic proverb: "Allah knows best, and time will show!" Then, after a moment's pause, the single word: *"Kismet!"*

Silence again, in which the Master's brain reviewed the stirring incidents of the past hour and a half—how the stowaway had evaded Dr. Lombardo's vigilance and, thoroughly familiar with every detail of Nissr, had succeeded in making his way to the aft port fuel-tank, from which he had probably drained petrol through a pet-cock and thereafter set it afire; how the miscreant had then scrambled up the aft companion ladder, to shoot down the Master himself; and how only a horrible, nightmare fight against the flames had saved even this shattered wreck of the air liner.

It had all been Kloof's fault, of course, and Lombardo's. Those two had permitted this disaster to befall, and—yes, they should be punished, later. But how? The Master's mind attacked this problem. Each of the four legionaries in the pilot-house was busy with his own thoughts.

On and on toward the approaching shores of Africa drifted the wounded Eagle of the Sky, making no headway save such as the east wind gave her. Steadily the needle of the altimeter kept falling. The high-pitched drone of the helicopters told that the crippled engines were doing their best; but even that best was not quite enough.

Like a tired creature of the air, she lagged, the liner sank. Before half the distance had been covered to that gleaming beach, hardly six hundred feet lay between the lower gallery of Nissr and the long, white-toothed waves that, slavering, hungered for her body and the despairing crew she bore.

Suddenly the Master spoke into the engine-room telephone.

"Can you do any better?" [illegible] the chief. "This is not enough!"

"We're doing our best, sir," came the voice of Frazier, now in charge.

"If you can possibly strain a point, in some way, and wring a little more power out of the remaining engines—?"

"We're straining them beyond the limit now, sir."

The Master fell silent, pondering. His eyes sought the dropping needle. Then the light of decision filled his eyes. A smile came to his face, where the deep gash made by the splinter of glass had been patched up with collodion and cotton. He plugged in on another line, by the touch of a button.

"Simmonds! Is that you?"

"Yes, sir," answered the quartermaster, in charge of all the stores.

"Have you jettisoned everything?"

"All we can spare, sir. All but the absolute minimum of food and water."

"Overboard with them all!"

"But, sir—"

"And drop the body of Auchincloss, too. This is no time for sentiment!"

"But—"

"My order, sir!"

Five minutes later, cases, boxes, bales, water-tanks began hurtling from open ports and down through the trap-door in the lower gallery. Then followed the seared corpse of Auchincloss, a good man who had died in harness, fighting to the end. Those to whom the duty was assigned of giving his metal-weighted body sea-burial turned away their eyes, so that they might not see that final plunge. But the sound of the body striking the waves rocketed up to them with sickening distinctness.

Lightened a little, Nissr seemed to rally for a few minutes. The altimeter-needle ceased its drop, trembled and even rose .275 degrees.

"God! If we only had an ounce more power!" burst out the major, his mouth mumbling the loose ends of that flamboyant mustache. The Master remained quite impassive, and made no answer. Bohannan reddened, feeling that the chief's silence had been another rebuff. And on, on drifted Nissr, askew, up-canted, with the pitiless sunlight of approaching evening in every detail revealing—as it slanted in, almost level, over the far-heaving infinitudes of the Atlantic—the ravages wrought by flame.

Bohannan could not long be silent. The exuberance of his nature burst forth with a half-defiant:

"If *I* were in charge, which I'm not, I'd

stop these damned helicopters, let her down, turn what power we've got into the remaining propellers, and taxi ashore!"

"And probably break up in the surf, on that beach, there!" curtly rejoined the Master. "Ah! *What?*"

His binoculars checked their sweep along the coast, which in its absolute barrenness looked a place of death for whatever might have life there.

"You see something, *mon capitaine?*" asked Leclair, blowing smoke from his cigarette. "Allow me also to look! Where is it?"

"Just to north of that gash—that wady, or gully, making down to the beach. You see it, eh?"

Slowly the French ace swept the glasses along the surf-foamed fringes of that desolation. Across the lenses no tree flung its green promise of shade. No house, no hut was visible. Not even a patch of grass could be discerned. The African coast lay stretched out in ivory nakedness, clean, bare, swept and garnished by simooms, by cruel heat, by the beatings of surf eternal.

Back of it extended an iron hinterland, savage with desert spaces of sun-baked, wrinkled earth and sand here and there leprously mottled with white patches of salt and with what the Arabs call *sabkhah,* or sheets of gypsum. The setting sun painted all this horror of desolation with strange rose and orange hues, with umbers and pale purples that for a moment reminded the Master of the sunset he had witnessed from the windows of Niss'rosh, the night his great plan had come to him. Only eight days ago, that night had been; it seemed eight years!

Carefully Leclair observed this savage landscape, over which a brilliant sky, of luminous indigo and lilac, was bending to the vague edge of the world. Serious though the situation was, the Frenchman could not repress a thought of the untamed beauty of that scene—a land long familiar to him, in the days when he had flown down these coasts on punitive expeditions against the rebellious Beni Harb clans of the Ahl Bayt, or people of the black tents. Africa, once more seen under such unexpected circumstances, roused his blood as he peered at the crude intensity of it, the splendid blaze of its seared nakedness under the blood-red sun-ball now dropping to rest.

All at once his glass stopped its sweep.

"Smoke, *mon capitaine!*" he exclaimed. "See, it curls aloft like a lady's ringlet. And—beyond the wady—"

"Ah, you see them, too?"

The major's glass, held unsteadily in his unbandaged hand, was now fixed on the indicated spot, as was "Captain Alden's."

"I see them," the Master answered. "And the green flag—the flag of the Prophet—?"

"The flag, *oui, mon capitaine!* There are many men, but—"

"But what, lieutenant?"

"Ah, do you not see? No horses. No camels. That means their oasis is not far. That means they are not traveling. This is no nomandic moving of the Ahl Bayt. No, no, *mon capitaine.* It is—"

"Well, what?"

"A war-party. What you in your language call the—the reception-committee, *n'est-ce pas?* Ah, yes, the reception committee."

"And the guests?" demanded the major.

"The guests are all the members of the Flying Legion!" answered the Frenchman, with another draw at his indispensable cigarette.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WAITING MENACE.

"AH, sure now, but that's fine!" exclaimed the major with delight, his eyes beginning to sparkle in anticipation. "The best of news! A little action, eh? I ask nothing better. All I ask is that we live to reach the committee—live to be properly killed! It's this dying alive that kills *me!* Faith, it tears the nerves clean out of my body!"

"That is a true Arab idea, major," smiled Leclair. "To this extent you are brother to the Bedouin. They call a man *fatis,* as a reproach, who dies any other way than fighting. May you never—may none of us—ever be *fatis!*"

"There's not much danger of that!" put in the Master. "That's a big war-party, and we're drifting ashore almost exactly where they're waiting. From the appearance of the group, they look like Beni Harb people—'Sons of Fighting,' you know—, though I didn't expect we'd sight any of that breed so far to westward."

"Beni Harb, eh?" echoed the Frenchman, his face going grim. "Ah, *mes amis,* it is with pleasure I see that race, again!" He sighted carefully through his glass, as Nissr sagged on and on, ever closer to the waves, ever nearer the hard, sun-roasted shores of Africa. "Yes, those are Beni Harb men. *Dieu!* May it be Sheik Abd el Rahman's tribe! May I have strength to repay the debt I owe them!"

"What debt, lieutenant?" asked the chief.

Leclair shrugged his shoulders.

"A personal matter, *mon capitaine!* A personal debt I owe them—with interest!"

"You will have nearly a score and a half of good fighting men to help you settle your account," smiled the Master. Then, to Bohannan: "It looks now, major, as if you'd have a chance to try your sovereign remedy."

"Faith! Machine-guns, eh?"

"Yes, provided we get near enough to use them."

"No vibrations this time, eh?" demanded the Celt, a bit of good-humored malice in his voice. "Vibrations are all very well in their way, sir, but when it comes to a man-to-man fight—"

"It's not that, major," the chief interrupted. "We haven't the available power, now, for high-tension current. So we must fall back on lesser means.

"You, sir, and Lieutenant Leclair, get the six gun-crews together and at their stations. When we drift in range, give the Beni Harb a few trays of blanks. That may scatter them without any further trouble. We want peace, but if it's got to be war, very well. If they show real fight, rake them hard!"

"They will show fight, surely enough, *mon capitaine,*" put in Leclair, as he and the major made their way to the oddly tip-tilted door leading back into the main corridor. "I know these folk. No blank cartridges will scatter that breed. Even the Turks are afraid of them. They have a proverb: 'Feed the Beni Harb, and they will fire at Allah!' That says it all.

"Mohammed laid a special curse on them. I imagine your orderly, Rrisa, will have something to say when he learns that we have Beni Harb as opponents. Now, sir, we shall make all haste to get the machine-guns into action!"

Major Bohannan laughed with more enjoyment than he had shown since Nissr had left America. They both saluted and withdrew. When the door was closed again, a little silence fell in the pilot-house, the floor of which had now assumed an angle of nearly 30 degrees. The droning of the helicopters, the drift of the sickly white smoke that—rising from Nissr's stern—wafted down-wind with her, the drunken angle of her position all gave evidence of the serious position in which the Flying Legion now found itself. Suddenly the Master spoke. His dismissal of Bohannan and Leclair had given him the opportunity he wanted.

"Captain Alden," said he, bruskly, with the unwillingness of a determined man forced to reverse a fixed decision. "I have reconsidered my dictum regarding you."

"Indeed, sir?" asked the woman, from where she stood leaning against the sill of the slanted window. "You mean, sir, I am to stay with the Legion, till the end?"

"Yes. Your service in having shot down the stowaway renders it imperative that I show you some human recognition. You gained admission to this force by deception, and you broke parole and escaped from the stateroom where I had imprisoned you. But, as you have explained to me, you heard the explosion, you heard the outcry of pursuit, and you acted for my welfare.

"I can weigh relative values. I grant your request. The score is wiped clean. You shall remain on one condition."

"And what is that, sir?" asked "Captain Alden," with a voice of infinite relief.

"That you still maintain the masculine disguise. The presence of a woman, as such, in this Legion, would be a disturbing factor. You accept my terms?"

"Certainly! May I ask one other favor?"

"What favor?"

"Spare Kloof and Lombardo!'

"Impossible!"

"I know their guilt, sir. Through their carelessness in not having discovered the stowaway and in having let him escape, the Legion came near sudden death. I know Nissr is a wreck, because of it. Still, we need men, and those two are good fighters. Above all, we need Lombardo, the doctor. I ask you to spare them at least their lives!"

"That is the woman's heart in you speaking, now," the chief answered, coldly. His eyes were far ahead, where the war-party was beginning to debouch on the white sands along the shore—full three hundred fighting-men, or more, well armed, as the tiny sparkles of sunlight flicked from weapons proved. As Nissr drew in to land, the Beni Harb grew visible to the naked eye, like a swarm of ants on the desert rim.

"The woman's heart," repeated the Master. "That is your only fault and weakness, that you are a woman and that you forgive."

"You grant my request?"

"No, captain. Nor can I even discuss it. Those two men have cut themselves off from the Legion and signed their own death-warrant. The sentence I have decided on, must stand. Do not speak of this to me again, madam! Now, kindly withdraw."

"Yes, sir!" And Alden, saluting, approached the door.

"One moment! Send Leclair back to me. Inform Ferrara that he is to command the second gun-crew."

"Yes, sir!" And the woman was gone.

Leclair appeared, some moments later. He suspected nothing of the subterfuge whereby the Master had obtained a few minutes' conversation alone with "Captain Alden."

"You sent for me, sir?" asked the Frenchman.

"I did. I have some questions to ask you. Others can handle the guns, but you have special knowledge of great importance to me. And first as an expert ace, what are our chances of making that shore, sir, now probably five miles off? In a crisis, I always want to ask an expert's opinion."

Leclair peered from under knit brows at the altimeter needle and the inclinometer. He leaned from the pilot-house window and looked down at the waves, now hardly a hundred feet below, their foaming hiss quite audible. From those waves, red light reflected from the setting sun illuminated the Frenchman's lean, brown features and flung up wavering patches of illumination against the pilot-house ceiling of burnished metal, through the tilted window that sheerly overhung the water.

"*Eh bien*—" murmured Leclair, noncommittally.

"Well, can we make it, sir?"

The ace inspected the vacuum-gauges, the helicopter tachimeters, and shrugged his shoulders.

"*Fais tout, toi-même, et Dieu t'aidera,*" he quoted the cynical old French proverb.* "If nothing gives way, there is a chance."

"If we settle into the sea, do you think that with our damaged floats we can drive ashore without breaking up?"

"I do not, *monsieur*. There is a heavy sea running, and the surf is bad on the beach. This Rio de Oro coast is bad. Have you our exact position?"

"Almost exactly on the Tropic of Cancer, half-way between Cape Bojador to north of us, and Cape Blanco, to south."

"Yes, I understand. That brings us to the Tarmanant region of the Sahara. Fate could not have chosen worse for us. But, *c'est la guerre*. All I regret, however, is that in a crippled condition we have to face a war-party of the Beni Harb. Were we intact, and a match for them, how gladly would I welcome battle with that scum of Islam! Ah, the *canaille!*"

CHAPTER XXI.

SHIPWRECK AND WAR.

"YOU call them dogs, eh?" asked the chief. "And why?"

"What else are such apostate fanatics? People who live by robbery and

* "Do everything for thyself, and God will help thee."

plunder—people who, if they find no gold in your money-belt, will rip your stomach open to see if you've swallowed it! People who boast of being *harami*—highwaymen—and who respect the *jallah*, the slave-driver!

"People who practise the barbaric, *thar*, or blood-feud! People who torture their victims by cutting off the ends of their fingers before beheading or crucifying them! People who glory in murdering the 'idolators of Feringhistan,' as they call us white men! Let me advise you, my captain, when dealing with these people or fighting them, never use your last shot on them. Always keep a mercy-bullet in your gun!"

"A mercy-bullet?"

"For yourself!"

The Master pondered a moment or two, as Nissr drifted on toward the now densely-massed Arabs on the beach, then he said:

"You seem to know these folk well."

"Only too well, my captain."

The Master's next words were in the language of the desert:

"*Hadratak tet kal'm Arabi?*" (You speak Arabic?)

"*Na'am et kal'm!*" affirmed the lieutenant, smiling. And in the same tongue he continued, with fluent ease: "Indeed I do, Effendi. Yes, yes, I learned it in Algiers and all the way south as far as the headwaters of the Niger.

"Five years I spent among the Arabs, doing air-work, surveying the Sahara, locating oases, mapping, what until then were absolutely unknown stretches of territory. I did a bit of bombing, too, in the campaign against Sheik Abdul Rahman, in 1913."

"Yes, so I have heard. You almost lost your life, that time?"

"Only by the thickness of a *semmah*-seed did I preserve it," answered the Frenchman. My mechanician, Lebon, and I—we fell among them on account of engine-trouble, near the oasis of Adrar, not far from here. We had no machine-gun—nothing but revolvers. We stood them off for seven hours, before they rushed us. They captured us only because our last cartridges were gone."

"You did not save the mercy-bullet that time, eh?"

"No, my captain. I did not know them then as I do now. They knocked us both senseless, and then began hacking our machine to pieces with their huge *balas* (yataghans). They thought our 'plane was some gigantic bird.

"Superstition festers in their very bones! The giant bird, they believed, would ruin their date-crops; and, besides, they thirsted for the blood of the Franks. As a matter of fact, my captain, these people do sometimes drink a little of the blood of a slaughtered enemy."

"Impossible!"

"True, I tell you! They destroyed our 'plane with fire and sword, reviled us as pigs and brothers of pigs, and named poor Lebon *'Kalb ibn Kalb,'* or 'Dog and son of a dog.' Then they separated into two bands. One band departed toward Wady Tawarik, taking Lebon. They informed me that on the morrow they would crucify him on a cross of palm-wood, head downward."

"And they executed Lebon?"

Leclair shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose so," he answered with great bitterness. "I have never seen or heard of him since. As for me, they reserved me for some festivities at Makam Jibrail. During the next night, a column of Spanish troops from Rio de Oro rushed their camp, killed sixty or seventy of the brown demons, and rescued me. Since then I have lusted revenge on the Beni Harb!"

"No wonder," put in the chief, once more looking at the beach, where now the war-party was plainly visible to the naked eye in some detail. The waving of their arms could be distinguished; and plainly glittered the blood-crimson sunset light on rifle-barrels, swords and javelins. The Master loosened his revolver in its holster. "About twenty minutes from now, at this rate," he added, "some of the Beni Harb will have reason to remember you."

"Yes, and may Jehannum take them all!" exclaimed the Frenchman, passionately. His eyes glowered with hate as he peered across the narrowing strip of waves and surf. "Jehannum, where every time their skins are burned off, as the Koran says, new ones will grow to be burned off again! Where they shall have garments of

fire fitted upon them and boiling water poured upon their heads, and they shall be beaten with maces of iron—' "

" ' And their tormentors shall say unto them: "Taste ye the pain of burning!" ' " the Master concluded the familiar quotation with a smile. " Waste no time in wishing the Beni Harb future pain, my dear lieutenant. Jehannum may indeed reserve the fruit of the tree Al Zakkum, for these dogs, but our work is to give them a foretaste of it, to-day. Kismet seems to have willed it that you and the Beni Harb shall meet again. Is it not a fortunate circumstance, for you?"

" Fortunate, yes," the Frenchman answered, his eyes glowing as they estimated the strength of the war-party, now densely massed along the shining sands. " But, thank God, there are no women in this party! That would mean that one of us would have to kill a woman—for God help a woman of Feringhistan caught by these *jinnee,* these devils of the waste!"

Silence again. Both men studied the Beni Harb. The Frenchman judged, reverting to his native tongue: " Certainly more than three hundred of these 'abusers of the salt,' my captain. And we are hardly thirty. Even if we reach land, we must soon sink to earth. Without food, water, anything— *ce n'est pas gai, hein?"*

" No, it is not gay," the chief answered. " But with machine-guns—"

" Machine-guns cannot fight against the African sun, against famine, thirst, delirium, madness. Well—' blessed be certainty,' as the Arabs say."

" You mean death?"

" Yes, my captain. We always have that in our grasp, at any rate—after having taken full toll of these devils. I should not mind, so much, defeat at the hands of the nobler breed of the Arabian peninsula. There, in the *Ruba el Khali itself,** I know a chivalric race dwells that any soldier might be proud to fight or to rule over. But these Shiah heretic swine—ah, see now, they are taking cover already? They will not stand and fight, like men!"

Scornfully he flung a hand at the Beni Harb. The fringes of the tribe were trickling up the sands, backward, away, toward the line of purple-hazed dunes that lined the coast. More and more of the war-party followed. Gradually all passed up the wady, over the dunes and vanished.

" They are going to ambush us, my captain," said Leclair. " ' In rice, strength; in the Beni Harb, manhood!' "

Nearer the land, ever sagging down but still afloat—though now at times some of the heavier surges broke in foam over the rail of the lower gallery—the Eagle of the Sky drifted on, on. Hardly a half-mile now lay between airliner and shore. Suddenly the Master began to speak:

" Listen, lieutenant! Events are at a crisis, now. I will speak very plainly. You know the Arabs, good and bad. You know Islâm, and all that the Mohammedan world is. You know there are more than 230,000,000 people of this faith, scattered from Canton to Sierra Leone, and from Cape Town to Tobolsk all over Turkey, Africa and Arabia—an enormous, fanatic, fighting race! Probably, if trained, the finest fighting-men in the world for they fear neither pain nor death. They welcome both, if their hearts are enlisted!"

" Yes, yes, I know! Their Hell yawns for cowards; their Paradise opens to receive the brave! Death is as a bride, to the Moslem!"

" Fanatics all, lieutenant! Only a few white men have ever reached Mecca and returned. Bartema, Wild and Joseph Pitt succeeded, and so did Hurgronje, Courtemont, Burton and Burckhardt—though the Arabs admit only the two last.

But how many hundreds have been beheaded or crucified! No pilgrimage ever takes place without a few such victims. A race of this type is a potential world-power of incalculable magnitude. Men who will die for Islâm and for their master without a quiver—"

" *Mon capitaine!* What do you mean?"

The lieutenant's eyes had begun to fill with flame. His hand tightened to a fist.

" *Mon Dieu,* what do you mean, my captain? Can it be possible you dream of—?"

* Ruba el Khali, " The Empty Abode," a name applied by the Arabs to the Peninsula, especially the vast inner region never penetrated by any white man.

Something whined overhead, from the beach now only about a quarter-mile distant. Then a shot from behind the dunes cracked out challengingly across the crumbling, hissing surf.

"Ah," laughed Leclair, "the ball has opened, eh? Well this is now no time for talk, for empty words. I think I understand you, my captain; and to the death I stand at your right hand!"

Their palms met and clasped, a moment, in the firm grip of a compact between two strong men, unafraid. Then each drew his pistol, crouching there at the windows of the pilot-house.

"Hear how that bullet sang?" questioned the Frenchman. "It was notched—a notched slug, my captain. That is a familiar trick with these dog-people of the Beni Harb. Sometimes, if they have poison, they dip the notched slug in that too. And, ah, what a wound one makes! Dum-dums are a joke beside such!"

Another shot sounded. Many ripped out along the dune. All up and down the crest of the tawny sand-hills, red under the sun now close to the horizon, the fusillade ran and rippled. On Nissr metal plates rang with the impact of the slugs, or glass crashed. The gigantic Eagle of the Air, helpless, received this riddling volley as she sagged ashore, now almost in the grip of the famished surf.

"Yes, the ball is opening!" repeated Leclair, with an eager laugh. His finger itched on the trigger of his weapon; but no target was visible. Why waste ammunition on empty sand-dunes?

"Let it open!" returned the chief. "We'll not refuse battle, no, by Allah! Our first encounter with Islâm shall not be a surrender! Even if we could survive that, it would be fatal to this vast plan of mine—of ours, lieutenant. No, we will stand and fight—even till 'certainty,' if Allah wills it so!"

A sudden burst of machine-gun fire, from the upper starboard gallery, crashed out into the sultry, quivering air. The kick and recoil of the powerful Lewis sent a fine, swift shudder through the fabric of the wounded Eagle.

"There goes a tray of blanks," said the Master. "Perhaps that will rout them out, eh? Once we can get them on the run—"

Leclair laughed, scornfully.

"Those dog-sons will not run from blanks, no, nor from shotted charges!" he declared. "Pariahs in faith, despoilers of the Haram—the sacred inner temple—still this breed of *Rafaz* (heretic) is bold. Ah, 'these dogs bare their teeth to fight more willingly than to eat.' It will come to hot work soon, I think!"

Eagerly he scanned the dunes, eager for sight of a white *tarboosh* or headgear at which to take a pot-shot. Nothing was visible but sand—though here, there, a gleam of steel showed where the Arabs had nested themselves down in the natural rampart with their long-barreled rifles cuddled through carefully-scooped rifts in the sand.

Again the machine-gun chattered. Another joined it, but no dust-spurts leaped from the dune, where now a continual play of fire was leaping out. The Beni Harb, keenly intelligent, sensed either that they were being fired at with blanks, or that the marksmanship aboard the airliner was execrable. A confused chorus of cries and jeers drifted from the sandhills; and all at once a tall, gaunt figure in a brown and white striped burnous, with the hood drawn up over the head, leaped to sight.

This figure brandished a tremendously long rifle in his left hand. His right was thrust up, with four fingers extended—the sign of wishing blindness to enemies. A splendid mark this Arab made. The Master drew a fine bead on him and fired.

Both he and Leclair laughed, as the Arab pitched forward in the sand. Unseen hands dragged the warrior back, away, out of sight. A slug crashed through the upper pane of the port window, flattened itself against the main corridor door and dropped to the sofa-locker.

The Master reached for the 'phone and switched in the connection with the upper starboard gallery.

"Major Bohannan!" he ordered. "No more blanks! The real thing, now—but hold your fire till we drift over the dune!"

"Drift over!" echoed Leclair. "But, monsieur, we'll never even make the beach!"

"So?" asked the chief. He switched to the engine-room.

"Frazier! Lift her a little, now! Rack everything — strain everything — break everything, if you must, but lift her!"

"Yes, sir!" came the engineer's voice. "I'll scrap the engines, sir, but I'll do that!"

Almost as if a mocking echo of the command and the promise, a dull concussion shuddered through Nissr. The drone of the helicopters sank to a sullen murmur; and down below, waves began angrily combing over the gallery.

"Ah, *nom de Dieu!*" cried Leclair, in sudden rage at seeing his chance all gone to pot, of coming to grips with the hated Beni Harb. From the penetralia of the airliner, confused shouts burst forth. The upper galleries grew vocal with execrations.

Not one was of fear; all voiced disappointment, the passion of baffled fury. Angrily a boiler-shop clatter of machine-guns vomited useless frenzy.

Wearily, like a stricken bird that has been forced too long to wing its broken way, the Eagle of the Sky—still two hundred yards from shore—lagged down into the high-running surf. Down, in a murderous hail of fire she sank, into the waves that beat on the stark, sun-baked Sahara shore.

And from three hundred barbarous throats arose the killing-cry to Allah—the battle-cry of Beni Harb, the murder-lusting Sons of War.

CHAPTER XXII.

BELEAGUERED.

"LA Illaha Illa Allà, M'hamed rasul Allah!"

Raw, ragged, exultant, a scream of passion, joy and hate, it rose like the voice of the desert itself, vibrant with wild fanaticism, pitiless and wild.

The wolf-like, high-pitched howl of the Arab outcasts—the robber-tribe which all Islâm believed guilty of having pillaged the Haram at Mecca and which had for that crime been driven to the farthest westward confines of Mohammedanism—the howl, I say, tore its defiance through the wash and reflux of the surf.

The pattering hail of slugs continued to zoon from the sand-hills, bombarding the vast-spread wings and immense fuselage of Nissr. For the most part, that bombardment was useless to the Beni Harb. A good many holes, opened up in the 'planes, and some broken glass, were about the Arabs' only reward.

None of the bullets could penetrate the metal-work, unless making a direct hit. Many glanced, spun ricochetting into the sea, and with a venomous buzzing like huge, angry hornets, lost themselves in quick, white spurts of foam.

But one shot at least, went home. Sheltered though the Legion was, either inside the fuselage or in vantage-points at the gun-stations, one incautious exposure timed itself to meet a notched slug. And a cry of mortal agony rose for a moment on the heat-shimmering air—a cry echoed with derision by fifteen score barbarians behind their natural rampart.

There was now no more shooting from the liner. What was there to shoot at, but sand? The Arabs, warned by the death of the gaunt fellow in the burnous, had doffed their headgear. Their brown heads, peeping intermittently from the wady and the dunes, were evasive as a mirage.

The Master laughed bitterly.

"A devil of a place!" he exclaimed, his blood up for a fight; but all circumstances baffling him. A very different man, this, from the calm, impersonal victim of ennui at Niss'rosh, or even from the unmoved individual when the liner had first swooped away from New York. His eye was sparkling, now, his face was pale and drawn with anger; and the blood-soaked cotton and collodion gave a vivid touch of color to the ensemble. That the Master had emotions, after all, was evident. Obvious, too, was the fact that they were fully aroused. "What a devil of a place! No way to get at those dog-sons, and they can lie there and wait for Nissr to break up!"

"Yes, my captain, or starve us where we lie!" the lieutenant put in. "Or wait for thirst and fever to do the work. Then—rich plunder for the sons of theft!"

"Ah, Leclair, but we're not going to stay here, for any such contingency!" exclaimed

the chief, and turned toward the door. "Come, *en avant!* Forward, Leclair!"

"My captain! You cannot charge an entrenched enemy like that, by swimming a heavy surf, with nothing but revolvers in hand!"

"Can't, eh? Why not?"

"The rules of war—"

"To hell with the rules of war!" shouted the Master, for the first times in years breaking into profanity. "Are you with me, or are you—"

"Sir, do not say that word!" cried the Frenchman, reddening ominously. "Not even from you can I accept it!"

The Master laughed again, and strode out into the main corridor, with Leclair close behind him.

"Men!" he called, his voice blaring a trumpet-call to action. "Volunteers for a short-party to clean out that kennel of dogs!"

None held back. All came crowding into the spacious corridor, its floor now laterally level but sloping downward toward the stern, as Nissr's damaged aft-floats had filled and sunk.

"Revolvers and lethal pistols!" he ordered. "And knives in belts! Come on!"

Up the ladder they swarmed to the take-off gallery. Their feet rang and clattered on the metal rounds. Other than that, a strange silence filled the giant airliner. The engines now lay dead. Nissr was motionless, save for the pitch and swing of the surf that tossed her; but forward she could no longer go.

As the men came up to the top gallery, the hands of the setting sun reached out and seized them with red ardor. The radiance was half-blinding, from that sun and from light reflected by the heavily running waves, all white-caps to shore. On both aileron-tips, the machine-guns were spitting intermittently, worked by crews under the major and Ferrara, the Italian ace.

"Cease firing!" ordered the Master. "Simonds, you and Prisrend deal out the lethal guns. Look alive, now!"

Sheltering themselves from the patter of slugs behind stanchions and bulwarks, the legionaries waited. The sea-wind struck them with hot intensity; the sun, now almost down, flung its river of blood from ship to horizon, all dancing in a shimmer of heat.

By the way Nissr was thumping her floats on the bottom, she seemed about to break up. But, undismayed, the legionaries armed themselves, girt on their war-gear and, cool-disciplined under fire, waited the order to leap into the sea. Not even the sight of a still body in the starboard gallery—a body from under which a snaky red line was crawling, zigzagging with each pitch of the liner—gave them any pause. This crew was well-blooded, ready for grim work of give-and-take.

"A task for me, sir!" exclaimed "Captain Alden," pointing at the body. The Master refused.

"No time for nursing, now!" he negatived the plea. "Unless you choose to remain behind?"

"Never, sir!"

"Can you swim with one arm?"

"With both tied!"

"Very well! All ready, men! Overboard, to the beach! There, dig in for further orders. No individual action! No charge, without command! Overboard—come on—who follows me?"

He vaulted the rail, plunged in a white smother, surged up and struck out for shore. Rrisa was not half a second behind him. Then came all the others (save only that still figure on the buffed metals), a deluge of leaping, diving men.

The surf suddenly became full of heads and shoulders, vigorous arms, fighting beachward. Strong swimmers every one, the Legion battled its way ashore, out from under Nissr's vast-spreading bulk, out from under her forward floats. Not one legionary but thrilled with the killing-lust, the eager spur of vengeance for Kloof, first victim of the Beni Harb's attack.

Along the dune, perhaps five hundred yards back of the beach, very many heads now appeared. The Arabs well knew themselves safe from attack, so long as these hated white swine of *Ajam** were in the breakers. Golden opportunity to pick them off, at ease!

* Arabs divide the world into two categories; themselves, and *Ajam*, or all non-Arabs.

A long, ragged line of desert men appeared, in burnouses and *benishes* or loose floating garments, and all heavily armed. The last bleeding rays of the sunset flickered on the silver-mounted rifles as they spit fire into the heat-quivering air.

All about the swimmers, water-spouts jetted up. Two men grunted, flailed wild arms and sank, with the water about them tinged red as the sunset. Another sank face-downward, a moment, then with only one arm, continued to ply for land, leaving a crimson trail behind.

None of the untouched legionaries took any heed of this, or stopped their furious swimming to see what damage had been done or to offer help. Life was at stake. Every second in the breakers was big with death. This was stern work, to be put through with speed. But the faces of the swimming men grew hard to look upon.

The Master and Leclair were first to touch foot to the shelving bottom, all churned up by the long cavalry-charges of the sea-horses, and to drag themselves out of the smother. Rrisa and Bohannan came next, then Enemark, and then the others—all save Beziers and Daimamoto, French ace and Japanese surgeon, whose work was forever at an end. Enemark, engineer and scientist, shot through the left shoulder, was dragged ashore, strangling, by eager hands.

"Down! Down!" shouted the Master. "Dig in!"

Right well he knew the futility, the suicidal folly of trying to charge three hundred entrenched men with a handful of panting, exhausted soldiers armed only with revolvers.

"Take cover!" his cry rang along the beach. They obeyed. Under a galling fire that flung stinging sand into their faces and that took toll of two more legionaries, wounded, the expedition dug for its very life.

The best of strategy! The only strategy, the Master knew, as—panting a little, with thick, black hair glued by sea-water to his head—he flattened himself into a little depression in the sand, where the first ripple of the dunes began.

Hot was the sand, and dry. Withered camel-grass grew in dejected tufts here, there, interspersed with a few straggles of halfa. A jackal's skull, bleached, lay close to the Master's right hand. Its polish attested the care of others of its kind, of hyenas and of vultures. Just so would a human skull appear, in no long time, if left to nature's tender ministrations. Out of an eye-hole of the skull a dusty gray scorpion half crawled, then retreated, tail over back, venomous, deadly.

Death lurked not alone in sea and in the rifles of the inhabitants of this harsh land, but even in the crawling things underfoot.

The Master paid no heed to shriveled gras, to skull or scorpion. All his thoughts were bent on the overcoming of that band of Islâmic outcasts now persistently pot-shotting away at the strange flying men from unknown lands "that faced not Mecca nor kept Ramadan"*—men already hidden in swiftly scooped depressions, from which the sand still kept flying up.

"Steady, men!" the Master called. "Get your wind! Ready with the lethal guns! Each gun, one capsule. Then we'll charge them! And—no quarter!"

Again, silence from the Legion. The fire from the dunes slackened. These tactics seemed to have disconcerted the Beni Harb. They had expected a wild, only half-organized rush up the sands, easily to be wiped out by a volley or two from the terribly accurate, long-barreled rifles. But this restraint, this business-like entrenching reminded them only too forcibly of encounters with other men of the Franks—the white-clad Spanish infantry from Rio de Oro, the dreaded *piou-pious*, zouaves, and *Légion Etrangère* of the French.

Firing ceased, from the Beni Harb. Silence settled on both sides. From the sea, the noise of waves breaking along the lower works of Nissr mingled with the hiss and refluent slither of the tumbling surf on the gleaming beach. For a while peace seemed to have descended.

A purple shade settled over the desert. The sun was nearly gone, now, and dusk would not be long in closing its chalice down over the light-wearied world. Leclair, entrenched beside the Master, whispered:

* The principal Mohammedan fast.

"They do not understand, these dog-brothers—may Allah make their faces cold!" He grinned, frankly, with sparkling eyes and white teeth. "Already we have their beards in our hands!"

The Master's only answer was to draw from his pocket an extra lethal-gun, hand it over and, in a whisper, hastily instruct the Frenchman how to use it. Then he cried, loudly:

"Ready, men! Fire!"

All along the line, the faint, sighing hiss of the strange weapons sounded Over the top of the dune little, almost inaudible explosions began taking place as—*plop! plop! plop!*—the capsules burst. Not now could their pale virescence be seen; but the Master smiled again, at realization that already the lethal gas was settling down upon the horde of Shiah outcasts.

To Leclair he whispered in Arabic an ancient saying of the desert folk: "'Allah hath given skill to three things, the hands of the Chinese, the brains of the Franks, the tongues of the Arabs!'" He added: "When the gas strikes them, they would think the Frankish brain more wonderful than ever—if they could think at all!"

He slid his hand into the breast of his jacket, pulled a little cord and drew out a silver whistle, the very same that he had used at Gallipoli. As he slid it to his lips, they tautened. A flood of memories surged over him. His fighting blood was up, like that of all the other legionaries in that hasty trench-line along the white sand-drifts.

A moment's silence followed. Outwardly, all was peace. No sound but the waves broke the African stillness. A little sand-grouse, known at *kata* by the Arabs, came whirring by. Far aloft, a falcon wheeled, keen-eyed for prey. Once more the deadly scorpion peeped from the skull, an ugly, sullen, envenomed thing.

The Master held up the silver whistle, glinting in the last sun-glow. They saw it, and understood. All hearts thrilled, tightening with the familiar sense of discipline. Fists gripped revolver-butts; feet shuffled into the sand, getting a hold for the quick, forward leap.

Keenly trilled the whistle. A shout broke from some twenty-five throats. The men leaped up, forward, slipping, staggering in the fine sand, among the bunches of dried grass. But forward they drove, and broke into a ragged, sliding charge up the breast of the dunes.

"Hold your fire, men! Hold it—then give 'em hell!" the Master shouted. He was in the first wave of the assault. Close by was Rrisa, his brown face contracted with fanatic hate of the Beni Harb, despoilers of the Haram sanctuary.

There, too, was "Captain Alden," grim with masked face. There was Bohannan, Leclair—and pistol-barrels flickered in the evening glow, and half the men gripped knives in their left hands, as well. For this was to be a killing without quarter, to the very end.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A MISSION OF DREAD.

PANTING, with a slither of dry sand under their laboring feet, the legionaries charged. At any second, a raking volley might burst from the dunes. The lethal pellets—so few in this vast space—might not have taken effect. Not one heart there but was steeling itself against ambush and a shriveling fire.

Up they stormed. The Master's voice cried, once more:

"Give 'em hell!"

He was the first man to top the dune, close to the wady's edge. There he checked himself, revolver in mid-air, eyes wide with astonishment. This way and that he peered, squinting with eyes that did not understand.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" ejaculated Leclair, at his side.

"*Walla!*" shouted Rrisa, furiously. "Oh, may Allah smite their faces!"

Each man, as he leaped to the rampart top, stood transfixed with astonishment. Most of them cried out in their native tongues.

Their amazement was well-grounded. Not an Arab was to be seen. Of all those Beni Harb, none remained—not even the one shot by the Master. The sand on the dune was cupped with innumerable prints of feet in rude *babooshes* (native shoes), and

empty cartridges lay all about. But not one of the Ahl Bayt, or People of the Black Tents, was visible.

"Sure, now, can you beat that?" shouted Bohannan, exultantly, and waved his service cap. "Licked at the start! They quit cold!"

Sheffield at his side, dropped to the sand, his heart drilled by a jagged slug. The explosion of that shot crackled in from another line of dunes, off to eastward—a brown, burnt ridge, parched by the tropic sun of ages.

Sweating with the heat and the exertion of the charge, amazed at having found—in place of windrows of sleeping men—an enemy still distant and still as formidable as ever, the legionaries for a moment remained without thought or tactics.

Rrisa, livid with fury and baffled hate, flung up wild arms and began screaming the most extravagant insults at the still invisible nomads, whose fire was now beginning again all along their line.

"Oh rejected ones, and sons of the rejected!" the Arab howled. "Oh hogs and brothers of hogs!" He fell to gnawing his own hand, as Arabs will in an excess of passion. Once more he screamed: "Oh Allah, deny not their skin and bones to the eternal flame! Oh owls, oxen, beggars, cut-off ones! Oh, give them the burning oil, Allah! The cold faces! Oh, wither their hands! Make them *kusah!* (beardless). Oh these swine with black livers, gray eyes, beards of red. Vilest that ever hammered tent-pegs, goats of El Akhfash! Oh, Beni Arb!"*

The Master gripped his furious orderly, and pushed him back, down the slope.

"No more of that, Rrisa!" he commanded, fiercely. "These be old woman's ways, these screamings! Silence, *Bismillah!*" (In Allah's name).

He hailed the others.

"They score, the first round! Their game is to retreat, if they're suspicious of any ruse or any attack from us. They're not going to stand and fight. We can't get near enough to them to throw the remaining lethal capsules over. And we can't chase them into the desert. Their plan is to hold us here, and pick us off one by one—wipe us out, without losing a man!

"Dig in again! That's our only game now. We're facing a situation that's going to tax us to the utmost, but there's only one thing to do—dig in!"

Life itself lay in digging, death in exposure to the fire of those maddeningly elusive, unseen Bedouins. Like so many dogs the legionaries once more fell to excavating, with their knives and their bare hands, the sun-baked sand that slithered back again into their shallow trench almost as fast as they could throw it out.

A ragged fire from the Beni Harb lent speed to their efforts. Dead men and wounded could now have no attention. Life itself was all at stake.

In their rude trench they lay, at last sweating, panting, covered with sand and dust, with thirst beginning to take hold on them, and increasing swarms of flies—tiny vicious, black things, all sting and poison—beginning to hum about them. On watch they rested there, while dull umbers of nightfall glowered through the framework of Nissr, tossing in the surf. Without much plan, wrecked, confronted by what seemed perils unsurmountable, the Flying Legion waited for the coming of dark to respite them from sniping.

The Master, half-way along the line with Leclaire, Rrisa, the major and "Captain Alden," mentally took stock of losses thus far sustained. The wounded were: Alden, Bohannan (burned), Enemark and himself. The dead: Kloof, Sheffield, Beziers, Travers, Gorlitz, Auchincloss, Daimamoto.

Twenty-four living remained, including Leclaire. The mortality, in about eighteen hours, had been 20 per cent. At this rate the Master understood, the Flying Legion was slated for very speedy destruction.

"It's touch-and-go now," he pondered. "We've got to annihilate these infernal Bedouins, repair the liner and get ahead, or—but there's no 'or' in this! None, at all!"

As dark settled down over the Sahara, the leprous patches of white, saline earth took on a ghostly pallor. The light of the

* Beni Harb, or Sons of Battle, by a change in the aspiration of the "H," becomes "Sons of Flight, or Cowardice."

southern stars began to glow with soft radiance. A gigantic emptiness, a rolling vacancy of sea and earth—brine-waves to rear of the Legion, sand-waves ahead—shrank the party to seemingly insignificance.

A soft, purple tapestry of night unrolled across the desert; the wind died, and the suffocating breath of overheated sands began to emanate from the baked earth. And ever more and more pestiferously the infernal torment of the flies increased.

Inflamed with chargin, rage and grief for the lost comrades, the legionaries lay in waiting. No conversation ran along the line. Silence held them—and their own thoughts. Wounds had been dressed as well as they might be. Nothing remained but to await the Master's next command.

" Captain Alden's" suggestion that Kloof, still lying aboard in the liner, should be seen to, met a rebuff from the Master. Living or dead, one man could not now endanger the lives of any others. And that danger still lay in any exposure was proved by the intermittent firing from the Arab lines.

The Beni Harb were obviously determined to hold back any possibility of a charge, or any return to the protection of the giant flying-ship. Bullets whimpered overhead, spudded into the sand, or pinged against metal on the liner. Parthian fighters though these Beni Harb were, they surely were well stocked with munitions and they meant stern business.

" And stern business is what they shall have, once the dark is complete," the Master pondered. " It is annihilation for them or for us. There can be no compromise, nor any terms but slaughter!"

One circumstance was favorable—the falling of the wind. Had it risen, kicking up a harsher surf, Nissr must have begun to break. But as the cupped hand of night, closing over the earth, had also shut away the wind, the airliner was now resting more easily. Surf still foamed about her floats and lower gallery—surf all spangled with the phosphorencence that the Arabs call " jewels of the deep"—but unless some sudden squall should fling itself against the coast, every probability favored the liner taking no further damage.

In silence, save for the occasional easing of positions along the trench, the legionaries waited. Strange dim colors appeared along the desert horizons, half-visible in the gloom —funeral palls of dim purple, with pale, ghostly reflections almost to mid-heaven.

Some of the men had tobacco and matches that had escaped being wet; and cigarettes were rolled, passed along, lighted behind protections that would mask the match-gleam from the enemy. The comforting aroma of smoke drifted out on the desert heat. As for the Master, from time to time he slipped a khat-leaf into his mouth, and remained gravely pondering.

At length his voice sounded along the trench.

" Men of the Flying Legion," said he, " this situation is grave. We can't escape on foot, north or south. We are without provisions or water. The nearest white settlement is Rio de Oro, about a hundred miles to southward; and even if we could reach that, harassed by the Beni Harb, we might all be executed there, as pirates. We must go forward or die right here on this beach.

" In any kind of a straight fight, we are hopelessly outclassed. There are about 300 men against twenty-four of us, some of whom are wounded. Even if we took life for life, the Bedouins would lose less than ten per cent., and we'd be wiped out. And we couldn't expect to take life for life, charging a position like theirs in the night. It can't be a stand-up battle. It's got to be science against savagery, or nothing."

A murmur of approval trickled along the sands. Confidence was returning. The legionaries' hearts tautened again with faith in this strange, this usually silent and emotionless man whose very name was unknown to most of them.

" Just one other word," the Master continued, his voice calm, unshaken, quite impersonal. " If science fails, do not allow yourselves to be captured. The tortures of hell await any white man taken by these fanatics. Remember, always keep one mercy bullet—for yourselves!"

Another little silence. Then the chief said:

" I am going to take two men and undertake what seems a preposterous attack.

I need only two. I shall not call for volunteers, because you would all offer yourselves. You must stay here.

"In case my plan succeeds, you are to come at my call—three long hails. If my plan fails, Major Bohannan will command you; and I know you will all fight to the last breath and to the final drop of blood!"

"Don't do this thing, sir!" the major protested. "What chance of success has it? These desert men can see where a white man is blind. They can scent danger as a hunting-dog scents the spoor of game. You're simply throwing your life away and we need that life!"

"I will take Lieutenant Leclair, who knows these people," the Master continued, paying no heed, "and Rrisa, who is of their kin. You others, all sit tight!"

A chuckling laugh, out there on the vague sands, seemed to mock him. It burst into a raw, barking cacchination, that somehow stirred the blood with shrinking horror.

"One of the Sahara Sanitary Corps," remarked Leclair, dryly. "A hyena. Well may he laugh! Feasting enough for him and his before this dance is over!"

A gleam of fire, off to the left where the further dunes approached the sea, suddenly began to show. All eyes turned toward it. The little fire soon grew into a leaping flame, its base hidden by sand-mounds.

No Arabs were visible there, but they had surely lighted it, using driftwood from the beach. Up into the purple velvet night whirled sparks and fire-tongues; red smoke drifted on the vagrant desert breeze.

"A signal-fire, *m'almé!*" (master) whispered Rrisa. "It will be seen in far oases. If it burn two hours that will mean an enemy, with great plunder. Others of the Beni Harb will come; there will be gathering of the tribes. That fire must not burn, *m'almé!*"

"Nor must the Beni Harb live!" To the major: "Collect a dozen lethal guns and bring them to me!"

When the guns were at hand, the Master apportioned them between Leclair, Rrisa and himself. With the one apiece they already had, each man carried five of the guns, in pockets and in belt. The small remaining stock of lethal pellets were distributed and the weapons fully loaded.

"In three minutes, major," said the Master. "We leave these lines. Ten minutes after that, open a scattering fire, all along the trench. Shoot high, so as to be sure we are not hit."

"Ah, a barrage, sir?" the major exclaimed.

"Not in the least. My purpose is quite different. Never mind, but listen to my orders. Keep up that fire sparingly, for five minutes. Then cease. And keep silent till we return.

"Remember, I will give three long hails when we start to come back. Those will warn you not to shoot if you see dim figures in the night. Either we shall be back in these lines by nine o'clock, or—"

"Or we will go after you!" came the voice of "Captain Alden," with a little catch of anxiety not at all masculine. Something in the femininity of her promise stirred the Master's heart, a second, but he dismissed it.

"Either we shall return by nine, or never," he said calmly.

"Let me go, then!" whispered Alden. "Go, in place of you! You are more needed than I. Without you all these men are lost. Without me—they would not miss me, sir!"

"I cannot argue that point with you, captain. We start at once." He turned to Rrisa, and in Arabic said:

"The road we are about to take may lead you to Paradise. A sand-adder, a scorpion or a bullet may be the means. Dost thou stand firm with me?"

The Arab stretched out a thin, brown hand to him in the dark.

"Firm as my faith, Master!" he replied. "Both to help you, and to destroy the Beni Kalb (dog sons), I would pass through Al Araf, into Eblis! What will be, must be. No man dieth except by permission of Allah, according to what is written on the scrolls of the angel Al Sijil.

"I go with you, Master, where you go, were it to Jehannum! I swear that by the rising of the stars, which is a mighty oath. *Tawakkal al Allah!*" (place reliance on Allah).

"By the rising of the stars!" repeated Leclair, also in Arabic. "I too am with you to the end, *m'alme!*"

The Master assured himself that his night-glasses with the megaphotic reflectors were in their case slung over his shoulder. He looked once more to his weapons, both ordinary and lethal, and likewise murmured:

"By the rising of the stars!"

Then said he crisply, while the fireglow of Leclair's strongly-inhaled cigarette threw a dim light on the tense lines of his wounded face:

"Come! Let us go!"

Leclair buried his cigarette in the warm earth.

Rrisa caught up a handful of sand and flung it toward the unseen enemy, in memory of the decisive pebbles thrown by Mohammed at the Battle of Bedr, so great a victory for him.

Then he followed the Master and Leclair, with a whispered:

"*Bismillah wa Allahu akbar!*"*

Together, crawling on their bellies like dusty puff-adders of the Sahara itself, the three companions in arms—American, French, Arab—slid out of the shallow trench, and in the gloom were lost to sight of the beleaguered Flying Legion.

Their mission of death, death to the Beni Harb or to themselves had begun.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ANGELS OF DEATH.

IN utter silence, moving only a foot at a time, the trio of man-hunters advanced. They spaced themselves out, dragged themselves forward one at a time, took advantage of every slightest depression, every wrinkle in the sandy desert-floor, every mummy-like acacia and withered tamarisk-bush, some sparse growth of which began to mingle with the halfa-grass as they passed from the coast-dunes to the desert itself.

Breathing only through open mouths, for greater stillness, taking care to crackle no twig nor even slide loose sand, they labored on, under the pale-hazed starlight. Their goal was vague. Just where they should come upon the Beni Harb, in that confused jumble of dunes and *nullahs* (ravines) they could not tell; nor yet did they know the exact distance separating the Legion's trenches from the enemy. All was vague mystery—a mystery ready at any second, at any slightest alarm, to blaze out death upon them.

None the less, stout-hearted and firm of purpose, they serpented their painful way prone on the hot, dusty bosom of the Sahara. Fate for them and for all the Legion, lay on so slight a thing as the stirring of a twig, the *tunk* of a boot against a bleached camel's skull, the possibility of a sneeze or cough.

Even the chance scaring up a hyena or a vagrant jackal might betray them. Every breath, every heartbeat was pregnant with contingencies of life and death.

Groveling, they slipped forward, dim, moving shadows in a world of brown obscurity. At any moment, one might lay a hand on a sleeping puff-adder or a scorpion. But even that had been fore-reckoned. All three of them had thought of such contingencies and weighed them. Not one but had determined to suppress any possible outcry, if thus stricken, and to die in absolute silence.

What mattered death for one, if two should win to the close range necessary for discharging the lethal capsules? What mattered it even for two, if one should succeed? The survivors, or the sole survivor, would simply take the weapons from the stricken and proceed.

After what seemed more than an hour, though in fact it was but the ten minutes agreed on with Bohannan, off behind them toward the coast a sudden staccato popping of revolvers began to puncture the night. Up and down the legionaries' trench it pattered, desultory, aimless.

The three men engaged in the perilous task of what the Arabs call *asar* or enemy-tracking, lay prone, with bullets keening high overhead. As the Master looked back, he could see the little spurts of fire from that fusillade.

* In the name of Allah, and Allah is greatest!

The firing came from more to the left than the Master had reckoned, showing him, that he had got a little off his bearings. But now he took his course again, as he had intended to do from the Legion's fire; and presently rifle work from the Arabs, too, verified his direction.

The Master smiled. Leclair fingered the butt of his revolver. Rrisa whispered curses:

"Ah, dog-sons, may you suffer the extreme cold of El Zamharir! Ah, may *Rih al Asfar,* the yellow wind, (cholera) carry you all away!"

The racket of aimless firing continued a few minutes, underneath the mild effulgence of the stars. It ceased, from the Legion's trenches at the agreed moment; and soon it died down, also from the Arabs'. Quiet rose again from the desert, broken only by the surf-wash on the sand, the far, tremulous wail of a jackal, the little dry skitter of scorpions.

The three scouts lay quiet for ten minutes after the volleying had ceased. Silence settled over the plain; but, presently, a low moaning sound came indistinctly from the east. It lasted only a moment, then died away; and almost at once, the slight wind that had been blowing from the sea hushed itself to a strange calm.

Rrisa gave anxious ear. His face grew tense, but he held his peace. Neither of the white men paid any heed to the slight phenomenon. To them it meant nothing. For all their experience with the desert, they had never happened to hear just that thing. The Arab, however, felt a stab of profound anxiety. His lips moved in a silent prayer to Allah.

Once more the Master raised his hand in signal of advance. The three man-stalkers wormed forward again. They now had their direction, also their distance, with extreme precision; a simple process of triangulation, in which the glow of the beach-fire had its share, gave them the necessary data.

Undaunted, they approached the camp of the Beni Harb; though every moment they expected to be challenged, to hear the crack of an alarm-rifle or a cry to Allah, followed by a deadly blast of slugs.

But fortune's scale-pan dipped in their direction, and all held still. The sun-baked desert kept their secret. Onward they crawled, now over sand, now over cracked mud-flakes of saline deposit where water had dried at the bottom of a *ghadir.* All was calm as if the spirit of rest were hovering over the hot, fevered earth, still quivering from the kiss of its great enemy, the sun.

"Peace, it is peace until the rising of the morn!" a thought came to the Master's mind, a line from the chapter Al Kadr, in the Koran. He smiled to himself. "False peace," he reflected. "The calm before the storm!" Prophetic thought, though not as he intended it!

On and on the trio labored, soundlessly. At last the chief stopped, held up his hand a second, lay still. The others glimpsed him by the starlight, nested down in a shallow depression of the sand. They crept close to him.

"Lieutenant," he whispered, "you bombard the left-hand sector, toward the fire and the sea. Rrisa, take the right-hand one. The middle is for me. Fire at will!"

Out from belts and pockets came the lethal pistols. With well-estimate elevation, the attackers sighted, each covering his own sector. Hissing with hardly audible sighs, the weapons fired their strange pellets, and once again as over the woods on the Englewood Palisades—really less than twenty-four hours ago, though it seemed a month—the little greenish vapor-wisps floated down, down, sinking gently on the Sahara air.

This attack, they knew, must be decisive or all would be hopeless. The last supply of capsules was now being exhausted. Everything had been staked on one supreme effort. Quickly the attackers discharged their weapons; then, having done all that could be done, lay prone and waited.

Once again that hollow moaning sound drifted in across the baked expanse of the Sahara—a strange, empty sound, unreal and ominous. Then came a stir of sultry breeze, from the east It strengthened; and a fine, crepitant sliding of sand-particles became audible. Rrisa stirred uneasily.

"Master," he whispered, "we should not delay. If the *jinnee* of the waste overtake us, we may be lost."

"The *jinnee* of the waste?" the Master answered, in a low tone. "What nonsense is this?"

"The simoom, Master—the storm of sand. We call it the work of evil spirits!"

The Master made no reply, save to command silence.

For a time nothing happened in the Arabs' camp. Then came a little stir, off there in the gloom. A sound of voices grew audible. The name of Allah drifted out of the all-enveloping night, to them, and that of his Prophet. A cry: "*Ya Abd el Kadir* —" calling on a patron saint, died before the yast word, "*Jilani*," could find utterance. Then silence, complete and leaden, fell with uncanny suddenness.

The master laughed, dryly. He touched Leclair's arm.

"Strong medicine for the Beni Harb, lieutenant," said he. "Their own *imams* (priests) have strong medicine, too, but not so strong as that of the cursed sons of Feringhistan. Sleep already lies heavy on the eyelids of these sons of Allah. And a deeper sleep shall soon overcome them. Tell me, lieutenant, can you kill men wholesale?"

"Yes, my captain."

"Sleeping men, who cannot resist you? Can you kill them scientifically, in masses, without anger?"

"How do you know, my captain, that it will not be in anger?" And the Frenchman half-eased himself up on hands and knees, peering forward into the night. "After what these Beni Harb—or their close kin—have done to me and to poor Lebon—listen! What was that?"

"What do you mean?"

"That far, roaring noise?"

"It is nothing! A little wind, maybe; but it is nothing, nothing! Come, I am ready for the work!"

The Master stood up. Rrisa followed suit. No longer crawling, but walking erect, they advanced. They still used caution, careful to make no noise; but confidence had entered into them. Were not the Arabs all asleep?

The white men's faces were pale and drawn, with grim determination for the task that lay ahead—the task of converting the Beni Harb's camp into a shambles. The Arab's face, with white-rimmed eyes and with lips drawn back from teeth, had become that of a wild animal. Rrisa's nostrils were dilated, to scent out the enemy. He was breathing hard, as if he had run a mile.

"They are near, now, oh Master!" said he. "They are close at hand, these *Nakhawilah!* (pariahs). Allah, the high, the great, hath delivered them into our hands. Verily there is no power or might but Allah. Shall I scout ahead, Master, and spy out the camp?"

"No, Rrisa. I send no man where I will not gladly go myself. All three of us, forward!"

Again they advanced, watchful, revolvers in hands, ready for any sudden ambush. All at once, as they came up over a breastwork of hard clay and gravel that heaved itself into rolling sands, the camp of the Beni Harb became visible. Dim, brown and white figures were lying all about, distorted in strange attitudes, on the sand beyond the ridge. There lay the despoilers of the Haram, the robber-tribe of the Sheik Abd el Rahman, helpless in blank unconsciousness.

The Master laughed bitterly, as he strode forward into the camp, the long lines of which stretched vaguely away toward the coast where the fire was still leaping up against the stars, now paled with a strange haze.

Starlight showed weapons lying all about —long rifles and primitive flint-locks; *kanat* spears of Indian male-bamboo tipped with steel and decorated with tufts of black ostrich-feathers; and *jambiyahs*, or crooked daggers with wicked points and edges.

"Save your fire, men," said the Master picking up a spear. "There are plenty of means, here, to give these dogs the last sleep, without wasting good ammunition. Choose the weapon you can handle best, and fall to work!"

With a curse on the heretic Beni Harb, and a murmur of thanks to Allah for this wondrous hour, Rrisa caught up a short javelin, of the kind called *mirzak*. The lieutenant chose a wide-bladed sword.

"Remember only one thing, my brothers

in arms!" exclaimed the Master. "But that is most vital!" He spoke in Arabic.

"And what may it be?" asked the Frenchman, in the same tongue.

"I do not know whether old Sheik Abd el Rahman is with this party or not, but if either of you find him, kill him not! Deliver him to me!"

"Listen, Master!" exclaimed Rrisa, and thrust the point of his javelin deep into the sand.

"Well, what now, Rrisa?"

"Shall we, after all, kill these sleeping swine-brothers?"

"Eh, what? Thy heart then, has turned to water? Thou canst not kill. They attacked us—this is justice!"

"And if they live, they will surely wipe us out!" put in the Frenchman, staring in the gloom. "What means this old woman's babble, oh son of the Prophet?"

"It is not that my heart has turned to water, nor have the fountains of my eyes been opened to pity," answered Rrisa. "But some things are worse than death, to all of Arab blood. To be despoiled of arms or of horses, without a fight, makes an Arab as the worms of the earth. Then he becomes an outcast, indeed! 'If you would rule, disarm'." he quoted the old proverb, and added another: "'Man unarmed in the desert is like a bird shorn of wings'."

"What is thy plain meaning in all this?" demanded the chief.

"Listen, Master. If you would be the Sheik of Sheiks, carry away all these weapons, and let these swine awaken without them. They would drag their way back to the oases and the black tents, with a story the like of which has never been told in the Empty Abodes. The Sahara would do homage, Master, even as if the Prophet had returned!"

"*Lah!* (no). I am not thinking of the Sahara. The goal lies far beyond—far to eastward."

"Still, the folk are Arabs there, too. They would hear of this, and bow to you, my Master!"

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. I can take no chances, Rrisa. The land, here and to the eastward, might all arise against us. The tribes might come down on us like the *rakham*, the carrion-vultures. No, we must kill and kill, so that no man remains here—none save old Abd el Rahman, if Allah deliver him into our hands!"

"That is your firm command, Master?"

"My firm command!"

"To hear the Master is to obey. But first, grant me time for my *isha*, my evening prayer!"

"It is granted. And, Rrisa, *there* is the kiblah, the direction of Mecca!"

The Master pointed exactly east. Rrisa faced that way, knelt, prostrated himself. He made ablution with sand, as Mohammed allows when water cannot be found. Even as he poured it down his face, the strangely-gusting wind flicked it away in little whirls.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE GREAT PEARL STAR.

THE Master began to feel a peculiar anxiety. Into the east he peered, where now indeed a low, steady hum was growing audible, as of a million angry spirits growing nearer. The stars along that horizon had been blotted out, and something like a dark blanket seemed to be drawing itself across the sky.

"My captain," said the lieutenant, "there may be trouble brewing, close at hand. A sand-storm, unprotected as we are—"

"Men with stern work to do cannot have time to fear the future!"

Leclair grew silent. Rrisa alone was speaking, now. With a call of "*Ya Latij!*" (Oh Merciful One!) he had begun the performance of his ceremony with rigid exactness. He ended with another prostration and the usual drawing-down of the hands over the face. Then he arose, took up his javelin again, and with a clear conscience cried:

"Now, Master, I am ready for the work of helping Azraël, the death-angel, separate the souls and bodies of these Shiah heretics!"

A sudden howling of a jackal startled Rrisa. He quivered and stood peering into the night, where now the unmistakable hum

of an approaching sand-storm was drawing near. His superstitious soul trembled with the old belief of his people that creatures of the dog breed can see Azraël, invisible to human eyes. At thought of the death-angel standing nigh, his heart quaked; but rage and hate inspired him, and he muttered:

"Fire to your bellies, broiling in white flame! Fuel of Jehannum, may Eblis be your bed, and unhappy couch! Spawn of Shaytan (Satan), boiling water to cool your throats! At Al Hakkat (judgment-day) may the jinnee fly away with you!"

"To work, men!" cried the Master. "There is great work to do!"

As if in answer to his command, a blustering, hot buffet of wind roared down with amazing suddenness, filling the dark air with a stinging drive of sand. The fire by the beach flailed into long tongues of flame, throwing back shadows along the side of the wady. No stars were now visible. From empty spaces, a soughing tumult leaped forth; and on the instant a furious gust of fine, cutting particles whirled all about, thicker than driven snow in a northern blizzard.

"Iron, oh thou ill-omened one!" cried Rrisa, with the ancient invocation against the sand-storm. He stretched out his forefinger, making the sign of protection. Neither the meaning of his cry nor of the gesture could he have explained; but both came to him voluntarily, from the remote lore of his people.

He turned from the oncoming storm, leaning against the wind, clutching for his cap that the wind-devil had just whirled away. After it he stumbled; and, falling to his knees, groped for it in the gloom.

"Thousand devils!" ejaculated the Frenchman. "No time, now, for killing! Lucky if we get back ourselves, alive, to the beach! My captain!"

"What now?" the Master flung at him, shielding mouth and eyes with cupped hands.

"To the wady, all of us! That may give protection till this blast of hell passes!"

A startled cry from Rrisa forestalled any answer. The Arab's voice rose in a wild hail from the sand-filled dark:

"Oh, Master, Master!"

"What, Rrisa?"

"Behold! I—*I have found him!*"

"Found—?" shouted the Master, plunging forward. Leclair followed close, staggering in the sudden gale. "*Abd ed Rahman?*"

"The old hyena, surely! Master, Master! *See!*"

The white men stumbled with broken ejaculations to where Rrisa was crouched over a gaunt figure in the drifting sand.

"Is that he, Rrisa?" cried the Master. "Sure? Art thou sure?"

"As that my mother bore me! See the old jackal, the son of Hareth! (the devil). Ah, see, see!"

"*Dieu!*" exclaimed the Frenchman, in his own tongue. "It is none other!" with a hand of great rejoicing, he stirred the unconscious sheik—over whom the sand was already sifting as the now ravening simoom lashed it along.

Forgotten now were all his fears of death in the sand-storm. This delivery of the hated one into his hands had filled him with a savage joy, as it had the two others. "Ah, *mon vieux!* It is only the mountains that never meet, in time!"

The Master laughed, one of those rare flashes of merriment that at infrequent intervals pierced his austerity. Away on the growing sand-storm the wind whipped that laugh. Simoom and sand now appeared forgotton by the trio. Keen excitement had gripped them; it held them as they crouched above the sheik.

"Allah is being good to us!" exulted the Master, peering by the gale-driven fire-glare. "This capture is worth more to the Legion than a hundred machine-guns. What will not the orthodox tribes give for this arch-Shiah, this despoiler of the sacred Haram at Mecca?"

He began feeling in the bosom of the old man, opening the cloak-like burnous and exploring the neck and chest with eager fingers.

"If we could only lay hands on the fabled loot of the Haram!" he whispered, his voice tense with excitement.

Rrisa, wide-eyed, with curling lips of scorn peered down at the sheik. The ord-

erly, bare-headed, was shielding eyes and face from the sand-blast, with hands that trembled. His lips curled in scorn and hate as he peered at the prostrate heretic.

A tall, powerful figure of a man the sheik was, lying there on his right side with his robe crumpled under him—the robe now flapping, whipping its loose ends in the high and rising wind. His tarboosh had been blown away, disclosing white hair.

That hair, too, writhed and flailed in the gusts that drove it full of sand, that drifted his whole body with the fine and stinging particles. His beard, full and white, did not entirely conceal the three parallel scars on each cheek, the *mashali,* which marked him as originally a dweller at Mecca.

One sinewy brown arm was outflung, now almost wholly buried in the growing sand-drift. The hand still gripped a long, gleaming rifle, its stock and barrel elaborately arabesqued in silver picked out with gold.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Master again, pulling at a thin crimson cord his questing fingers had discovered about the old man's neck. With hands that trembled a little, he drew out this cord. Then he uttered an exclamation of intense disappointment.

There was nothing at the end of the crimson loop, save a *lamail* or pocket Koran. Leclair muttered a curse, and moved away, peering toward the fire, spying out the wady through the now almost choking sand-drive—the wady where they certainly must soon take refuge or be overwhelmed by the buffeting lash of sand whirled on the breath of the shouting tempest.

Even in the Master's anger, he did not throw the Koran away. Too astute, he, for any such act in presence of Rrisa. Instead, he bound the Arab to fresh devotion by touching lips and forehead, and by handing him the little volume. The Master's arm had to push its way against the wind as against a solid thing; and the billion rushing spicules of sand that swooped in upon him from the desert emptiness, stung his flesh like tiny scourges.

"This Koran, Rrisa, is now thine!" he cried in a loud voice, to make the Arab hear him. "And a great gift to thee, a Sunnite, is the Koran of this desecrating son of the rejected!"

Bowed before the flail of the sand—while Rrisa uttered broken words of thanks—the Master called to Leclair:

"By *Corsi* (Allah's throne), now things assume a different aspect! This old dog of dogs is a prize, indeed! And—what now—?"

Leclair did not answer. The Frenchman was not even near him. The Master saw him in the wady, dimly-visible through the ghostly white sand-shrouds spinning in the blue-whipped fire glare. There on hands and knees the lieutenant was huddled. With eager hands he was tearing the hood of a *za'abut*—a rough, woolen slave-cloak, patched and ragged—from the face of a prostrate figure more than half snowed under a sand-drift.

"*Nom de Dieu!*" the Master heard him cry. "*Mais, nom de—*"

"What have you found, lieutenant?" shouted the Master, letting the simoom drive him toward the wady. In their excitement none of the men would yet take cover, lie down and hide their faces under their coats as every dictate of prudence would have bidden. "Who is it, now? What—?"

"Ah, my captain! Ah! the pity of it! Behold!"

The Frenchman's voice, wind-gusted, trembled with grief and passionate anger; yet through that rage and sorrow rang a note of joy.

"Tell me, Leclair! Who, now?" demanded the Master, as he came close and peered down by the fire-gleam roaring on the beach, sending sheaves of sparks in comet-tails of vanishing radiance downwind with rushing sand.

"It is impossible, my captain," the lieutenant answered in French. His voice could now make itself heard more clearly; for here in the wady a certain shelter existed from the roaring sand-cyclone. "Impossible, but—*Dieu!*—it is true!"

"What is true?"

"Incredible, yet— *voilà!*"

"In Allah's name, lieutenant!" the Master ejaculated, "compose yourself! Explain! Who is this Arab, here?"

"No Arab, my captain! No, no!"

"Not an Arab? Well, what is he, then?"

"Ah, these scars, my captain! Behold—see the slave dress, the weals of the branding-iron on cheek and brow! Ah, for pity! See the starved body, the stripes of the lash, the feet mangled by the bastinado! What horrible things they have done to him—ah, God have pity on us!"

Tears gleamed on the stern fighter's cheeks, there in the ghostly blue-firelight—tears that washed little courses through the dust and sand now griming his face. The French airman, hard in battle and with heart of steel and flame, was crying like a child.

"What now? Who is it?" shouted the Master. "A European?"

"Yes, captain! A Frenchman!"

"A Frenchman. You don't mean to say it—is—"

"Yes, yes! My orderly! Lebon!"

"God!" exclaimed the Master. "But—"

A cry from Rrisa interrupted him, a cry that flared down-wind with strange, wild exultation. The Arab had just risen from the sand, near the unconscious, in-drifting form of the Sheik Abd el Rahman.

In his hands he was holding something—holding a leather sack with a broken cord attached to it. This cord in some way had been severed by the sheik's rifle when the old man had fallen. The leather sack had rolled a few feet away. Now, with hands that shook so that the Arab could hardly control them, Rrisa was holding out this sack as he staggered through the blinding sand-storm toward his chief.

"*Al Hamdu Lillah!*" (Praise to the Lord of the Three Worlds!) choked Rrisa in a strange voice, fighting for his very breath. "See—see what I—have found!"

Staring, blinking, trying to shelter his eyes against the demons of the storm, the Master turned toward him.

"What, Rrisa?"

Down into the wady stumbled the Arab, gray-powdered with clinging sand.

"Oh," he choked, "it has been taken from these *yezid*, these abusers of the salt! Now we rescue it from these cut-off ones! From the swine and brothers of the swine it has been taken by Allah, and put back into the hands of Rrisa, Allah's slave! See, Master, see!"

The shaking hands extended the leather sack. At it the Master stared, his face going dead white.

"Thou—dost not mean—?" he stammered.

"Truly, I do!"

"Not *Kaukab el Durri?*"

"Aye—it was lying near that heretic dog, my Master!"

"The Great Pearl Star, the sacred loot from the Haram?"

"*Kaukab el Durri*, Master. The Great Pearl Star itself!"

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.

THE TOUCH OF A HAND

BY MARGARET RIDGELY SCHOTT

AT times when the world seems dead,
And the heart is bound in frost,
When every bird or blossom
Forgotten is, or lost;

A hand is laid in ours—
Ah, the world is not so wrong!
And for every bud that blooms
The heart leaps up in song!

Zapt's Repulsive Paste

by J. U. Giesy

"MEOUW!" The sound was one of feline protestation, a sort of outraged plaint, uttered in the accents of a snarling rage.

"Goodness! Was that Fluffy?" exclaimed Miss Nellie Zapt to her fiancé, Bob Sargent, with whom she was sitting in the dusk, back of the vines on the porch of her father's house.

"Sounded like her voice, at any rate," Bob agreed.

"Meouw! Psst! Zit!"

Nellie started to her feet and stood slenderly poised as a fresh outburst of something suspiciously like inarticulate profanity drifted to her ears. And then she laid hold of her companion.

"Come along, there's something wrong," she urged, and dragged him to his feet.

She darted into the house intent on learning what had evoked the outcries so vociferously emitted by her pet, and Sargent followed very much as he had been following her for something like a year. She was a dainty, glowing creature, and Bob was all tangled up in her feminine charms. So he kept close now as with a tapping of quick little heels on polished wood she entered the living-room of the house *via* the entrance hall.

And then Nellie paused. She stared—at the figure of a small man with spectacles on the bridge of a high, thin nose, and iron-gray whiskers, who stood with back-tilted head, beside a small tin-pail deposited on the table in the center of the room.

"Father!" Miss Zapt gasped.

And Sargent also gave vent to an exclamation: "Good Lord!"

"Eh?" Xenophon Xerxes Zapt, "Unknown Quantity Zapt," as his associates sometimes called him because of the double "X" in his name, the celebrated investigator of the unknown in science, lowered his head and jerked it around in the direction of his daughter's voice. There was the atmosphere about him of a small boy apprehended in some prank. He put out a hand and laid it on the little tin-pail. "Did you speak, my dear?" Out of near-sighted blue eyes, he peered at his radiant offspring, who had drawn herself up in an indignant fashion.

"I did," said Miss Zapt firmly. "I suppose you're responsible for that?"

She lifted a graceful arm and pointed overhead, as indeed she very well might, considering that she pointed at the wildly gyrating form of a superb Angora cat.

One would hardly expect to find a Persian Angora flattened, with no visible means of support, against the ceiling of a room, as this one certainly was. She hung there threshing with frantic legs at the impalpable air, with a motion not unlike a rather desperate effort at swimming, the total result of which was that she spun herself about in a circle, marked by a rapidly alternating

head, from which gleamed yellow eyes and a twitching bushy tail. Her demeanor was little short of hysteria itself.

"Meouw!" she voiced her perturbation of spirit once more as she heard her mistress's voice.

With poor tact Sargent chuckled. "Seems to have got the Angora's angora," he began.

Miss Zapt gave him a withering glance.

"Never mind, Fluffy pet," she called encouragement to the glaring creature that had temporarily given over its efforts and rested with back pressed against the ceiling.

And then she bore down on the little man who had once more lifted his eyes to the animal above him. "I suppose this is another of your detestable experiments," she went on in a voice half tears and half rage. "What have you done to my cat?"

"Nothing, nothing—about the seventy-fifth of an ounce." Professor Zapt fumbled in the pocket of a limp house-coat for note-book and pencil, opened the former and touched the latter to his lips.

"Father!" Miss Zapt seized both book and pencil. She stamped her slippered foot.

"Eh? Oh, yes, yes—exactly." Xenophon Xerxes glanced into her flushed face. "As a matter of fact I have done nothing to your pet, my child—nothing at all worth mentioning, that is. Indeed, as you will note I have even exercised extreme caution. I have closed the windows, and the ceiling, of course, prevents her further ascension. But—if you refer to her present position—"

"It is rather unusual, don't you fancy, professor?" said Bob. "Now if she were a flying squirrel—"

"Exactly," Xenophon Zapt cut him short. "The term flying-squirrel is a misnomer, however, Robert. The animal so-called is incapable of sustaining itself for any considerable time in the air. As to the former part of your remark, however—hers is indeed a *most* unusual position, and it is that which proves the complete success of my experiment. You are now witnessing one of the marvels of the ages—voluntary levitation—the rediscovery of one of the lost secrets of the ancients. The means by which—"

Abruptly Nellie caught up the little pail. "I suppose your lost secret's in *this?*"

And swiftly Xenophon Zapt put out a hand to retrieve what she had seized. "Nellie," he commanded sternly, "replace that receptacle where you found it. As you surmise, it contains a substance of incalculable value—the first practical preparation of Zapt's Repulsive Paste."

"Wha-a-at!" Sargent crossed to gaze into the little bucket his fiancée was holding. "Does look sort of repulsive," he agreed after a glance at the mess in the bottom of the pail. "But—you mean this stuff is responsible for Fluffy's sudden elevation in life?"

"Exactly." Professor Zapt nodded. "The animal is not injured except in her feelings, I assure you. I merely rubbed a very small portion of the paste into the fur on the under side of her body, and she assumed the position you are now privileged to behold. I am sure that in later years you will be glad to recall this evening, to remember that you were the first to witness the reapplication of those principles once before known to our race. You—"

"Just at present," his daughter interrupted, "I'm far more interested in knowing whether having sent her up there you intend letting her remain until she starves to death."

"Eh?" Professor Zapt frowned. "Starves? Why, certainly not. Having demonstrated to our satisfaction the efficacy of this latest addition to science, we may consider the test as ended. If Robert will obtain a step-ladder from the basement, and you will procure some water in order that we may wash off the paste—"

"Sure," Bob assented, and departed on his errand. Nellie went with him as far as the kitchen.

Professor Zapt shook his head in depreciative fashion, retrieved his note-book and pencil from the table where Nellie had cast them, and began jotting down certain memoranda. His thin lips moved as his pencil traced its way across a page. "The seventy-fifth part of an ounce," he muttered.

Above his graying head glared a very much disgruntled cat. It was not the first time her mistress's father had made her the subject of some experiment.

In due season Sargent and Nellie reappeared. Bob set up his ladder and mounted to the rescue. Below Nellie waited with a basin of warm water and a soft cloth in her hands.

"Lay her on her back," Professor Zapt advised as Sargent descended with the Angora clinging desperately to him. "That way she will not present any tendency to rise. The paste does not affect anything beneath it, but merely what is superimposed. That is the secret of its adaptability—"

"Exactly," Bob accepted, grinning, and got down upon his knees.

Nellie knelt beside him. Together they administered to the resentful cat. While Bob held her, Nellie applied water to the body of her pet and dried her fur with the cloth. Fluffy glared, but submitted to superior force.

"Steady," said Bob at last, and turned her over. He removed his restraining hands, and in a flash she vanished through the door into the hall.

Xenophon watched the entire performance, his blue eyes glowing behind their lenses. He nodded as she disappeared. He rubbed his hands together as Bob rose and assisted Nellie to her feet. "A very satisfactory experiment," he declared; "a very satisfactory experiment, indeed. By it we have demonstrated beyond any possible cavil—"

"If you don't let Fluffy alone," Nellie turned upon him, "I'll—I'll pack up and leave home." For years, since her mother's death, she had taken care of the little man's temporal wants and managed the house, but there were times when his complete attention to his scientific pursuits and his lack of attention to everything else, got badly on her nerves. And now her violet eyes were winking, and her red mouth quivered.

"Any time you feel like that, I'll see you have another to go to," Bob suggested as she paused, with a little catch in breath.

"Ahem!" Xenophon Xerxes Zapt glared. He did not approve so wholly of Bob as did his daughter. "Do not make any premature preparations, Robert," he said, after a rather tense interval in which Nellie blushed. "The animal is not injured, as you yourself have seen, and as Nellie will realize in time. The main difficulty against which scientists have to contend in these days of self-interest is the conventional attitude of the average mind.

"Human beings are prone to allow some purely personal view-point to overshadow the major object to be attained. In the present instance it is consideration for a cat. It is permitted to obscure the fact that through her use we have demonstrated the rediscovery of the means by which the Egyptians built the Pyramids."

"What? By Jove!" Sargent opened his eyes in wonder as the point struck home. "You really mean that, professor?"

"Exactly," said Xenophon Zapt benignly, and stroked the graying whiskers on either side of his chin.

"But if that's the case," Bob began quickly, and came to a tongue-tied pause.

"It is the case, Robert."

"I know—but—" Sargent floundered, "if it is, why couldn't you have proved it just as well with a book or a rock or a box?"

For an instant the professor's blue eyes twinkled. "I suppose I could have done so, Robert," he replied, "but, as a matter of fact, I took the first object at hand when I was ready to make the test. I—er—that is, I didn't give the matter any further thought.

"My mind was focused on the larger point—the demonstration which proves beyond question that Zapt's Repulsive Paste will revolutionize the commercial world. By means of it we shall be able to accomplish marvels heretofore quite beyond any engineering scope; we shall, by inserting definite quantities of the paste between the object to be transported and the earth, be able to move enormous buildings, nullify the weight of tremendous loads, alter the entire present-day conception as appertaining to weight."

"I—don't doubt it," Bob agreed in actually enthusiastic fashion. "Lord, professor, it's simply wonderful when you explain it; and it's already sent Fluffy to the ceiling, and moved Nellie to tears."

"You beast," said Miss Zapt; but she smiled.

Her father frowned. "My chief objection to you, Robert, is the somewhat bizarre sense of humor which induces you to approach matters of weight in a light mood. If you would refrain from undue levity, there are times when I would be inclined to appreciate your otherwise not unintelligent apprehension of the results of scientific investigation."

"I beg your pardon, sir," Bob apologized meekly. "What was it you were saying about the Pyramids?"

"The world has long marveled how they were built, how it was possible to transport and place in their walls monoliths of such enormous size. The answer was suggested some years ago, but never carried further, so far as I am aware. It was reserved for me to prove the truth of that suggestion and give again to the world a substance similar in effect at least to the one they used.

"That substance you have seen in operation to-night. It is in principle a screen for gravitation. Objects above it become for the moment practically devoid of weight—mere trifles light as air."

"You—you mean it cuts off the operation of gravitation on anything above it?" Bob exclaimed. "Why, that's marvelous, professor."

"Exactly," Xenophon Zapt agreed.

"Dead or alive?"

"Animate or inanimate, as you have seen." The professor rubbed his hands. He eyed the stylish oxfords his daughter's fiancé was wearing. "For instance, Robert, I could rub a certain amount on the soles of your shoes, and you would walk a certain distance above the floor. Depending upon the quantity employed in proportion to your weight, you would rise slightly or higher, as the centripetal force of the earth revolutions threw you off.

"The entire action is capable of regulation by means of a calculation based upon the weight of the object to be moved. If I knew your exact weight I could cause you to lose ponderability altogether. I could even make you disappear. Still," he sighed, "I presume Nellie would object to that even more loudly than she protested my use of the cat. However, as a matter of scientific demonstration, it would be interesting, I think."

"Oh, very." Bob drew his modish footyear well under the chair in which he was sitting, and Nellie stiffened.

Xenophon Zapt arose. "I think I shall go to my study now and write a brief account of my experiment. To-morrow I shall begin the preparation of a large amount of the powder which, blended with water, constitutes the paste. I shall organize a company after a bit. If you wish, Robert, I shall permit you to purchase a reasonable amount of stock. Good night."

"Good night, sir. Thank you," said Bob, and watched him disappear, a quaint little figure in his loose slippers, his iron-gray whiskers and his shapeless, flapping coat.

And after he was quite out of sight he turned to Nellie. "Lord! Do you suppose he's really got it?" he remarked. "Something surely happened to Fluffy, and after we washed off the paste she was all right, and—I guess those old wiseacres did know something in their day. It makes a fellow feel funny—Egyptians and Pyramids, and all those things folks have pretty nearly forgotten. Say, what was that record you got the other day for the machine?"

Five minutes later, while Professor Xenophon Xerxes Zapt drew paper before him and dipped his pen in ink, his daughter and Sargent sat very close together on the living-room couch, while a phonographic reproduction of "Mummy Mine," echoed softly through the house.

True to his promise Professor Xenophon Xerxes Zapt spent the major portion of the succeeding day mixing and blending the ingredients of the powder which, when mixed with water, constituted the Repulsive Paste. He heaped it upon a tray and left it on a table in the up-stairs room that he habitually used as the scene of his scientific investigations—a room overlooking, from broad windows, the tree-shaded street.

And the succeeding morning he charged down-stairs about ten and informed Nellie that he had nearly overlooked the fact that he meant to attend the meeting of a scientific body to which he belonged in a neighboring town. In considerable haste he ar-

rayed himself in clean shirt and collar, the frock-coat, to which he consistently clung, and hat, and was on the point of departure for a train, when Nellie suggested that he had better wear his shoes, rather than the slippers on his feet. The professor acceding rather impatiently to the suggestion, the change of footgear was made and he departed. After that the day dragged past until four o'clock.

At that hour Bob Sargent, seated in the office where he dispensed legal advice to sundry clients, answered a ring on his phone.

"Oh, Bobby," came the voice of Miss Zapt"; come up to dinner. Dad's gone to one of his society meetings and he won't be home till rather late, and with all these recent burglaries and hold-ups in the city, I'm sort of nervous."

"Yes, you are," said Sargent with a chuckle, deriding the confession of Miss Zapt's timorous nerves.

"Yes, really I am," she insisted. "You'll come, won't you, Bob?"

"I will," said Bob without hesitation. And he did.

Because he was in love, and a dinner with his sweetheart tête-à-tête is something no true lover in his senses will pass up. He arrived about six with a box of Nellie's favorite candy and anticipations of a pleasant evening, since Miss Zapt's experience as manager of her father's household had made a dinner under her supervision a thing not to be missed.

In this particular case anticipation proved no more than the precursor of realization. The dinner was a course affair of finely balanced quality, and the two young people rather dallied over it, from soup to cheese, as young people sometimes will, until a sudden deepening of the twilight sent Nellie to the window just as a peal of thunder reverberated sharply through the house.

"Goodness, it's going to rain cats and dogs, Bob!" she exclaimed. "The sky's as black as ink."

"Let 'er rain," said Sargent, content with a well-filled stomach and the society of the lady of his affections. "We've a good roof over our heads, so we should worry."

"I was thinking of father," Nellie explained and giggled as she recounted the professor's attempt to leave home without his shoes. "He's so absent-minded about little things. Mercy!"

A small cyclone seemed sweeping through the house, sending curtains eddying in flapping streamers, and doors banging as they were caught and slammed in the draft.

There followed a few moments of rapid effort in closing windows and making all secure, and then youth and maiden stood briefly watching the first dashing flurry of the summer shower, before they pulled down the shades and withdrew to a low-toned conversation, dealing as usual under similar conditions, quite largely with themselves.

Meanwhile, some distance up the street a large and heavy-set figure sheltered itself as best it might beneath an arching tree, while waiting for the shower to pass.

It was that of Officer Dan McGuiness, patrolman on the beat that included the Zapt house. It wasn't a very exciting beat as a rule, but recently Danny had been nursing hopes. As Miss Zapt had said to Bob that afternoon, there *had* been a lot of burglaries of late and Danny really couldn't see why fate should not be kind and send one of the as yet unapprehended prowlers into his quiet street. He was thinking about it now as he listened to the patter of the rain among the leaves.

"Shure it would be a grand night for a poorch-climber to git in his fancy wuruk," he soliloquized. "Th' wind an' th' rain would cover any noises he might be makin'. 'Tis th' sort of noight I'd consider as made to me order was I a burglar myself."

And the thought having taken hold upon him was with him still, as the shower swept on across the countryside, and the moon appearing, began to flirt with the dripping landscape from behind a veil of ragged clouds. It sent him on down the street with a wary eye for any burglarious-minded individual who might have been of the same opinion as himself.

Thus he came in time to a house, with a wide front porch, above which was an open window; and rising over the top of the porch as Danny watched, an object like a human head.

With a heart beginning to beat more quickly, McGuiness drew into the shadow of a tree and waited. He knew this house as the home of Professor Xenophon Xerxes Zapt, inhabited by the old man and his daughter; and that open window and the head rising cautiously over the edge of the porch roof fitted in with the thoughts he had been entertaining. He thrust his club into its loop and felt for his revolver. He was convinced that at last he had been given his chance to prove himself.

The head kept on rising. It was followed by a crouching body, and a pair of legs. It became the figure of a man crawling on top of the porch toward the open window with the silent caution of stealth. Once it appeared to hesitate, to slip on the slanting surface, and then it again went on.

Officer McGuiness had seen enough. He drew his gun and started at a heavy run for the gate in the fence before the house. And, having reached it, he slipped through it without sound and following not the walk, but tiptoeing with burly caution over the dampened lawn, made his way quite close to the porch. Then and then only did he lift his voice in a heavy, authoritative summons:

" Coom out of ut, me poorch-climbin' beauty. What are ye doin' up there?"

For a moment the figure above him went flat. The flirtatious moon peeped out long enough to reveal it sprawled on the rain-soaked shingles. And then, in most surprising fashion—it floated straight up into the air!

Danny McGuiness stared. Little by little while his breath came harshly, he tilted back his head to observe that most amazing ascent of a human body without apparent means or visible cause.

The man was swimming up as one might swim in water, to judge by the frantic threshing of his arms and legs. But—Danny had never heard of any one's swimming in the air.

His eyes popped and his jaw dropped as his intended prisoner mounted twenty, fifty, seventy feet and paused, seemingly unable to go any higher. The policeman removed his helmet and scratched his head. The thing was beyond all precedent of experience, a defiance of natural law. A criminal accosted might vault a fence, or climb a wall, or even scale a building in an effort at escape; but to drop on his face and bounce into the air—and—stay there like a—like a kite! Danny put some of his bewilderment into a baffled mutter.

" He—went—up," he mumbled. " Howly Mither, is ut a man, or a flea or a flyin'-fish, divil take 'im. Coom down, I says, an' instead of realizin' th' disadvantages of his position, he rose straight up like a aeryoplane an' there he is."

And then remember the dignity of the law and his own standing as a representative of its force, he addressed the figure above him: " Well, that's enough now. Yer quite a burd to judge by yer actions, but—come on down out of that, and light."

Above him the figure was still undergoing contortions beneath the moon and the broken clouds. As he spoke it rolled halfway over and started like a plummet for the earth. Out of it there broke a strangled exclamation of sheer instinctive terror. By a wild effort it again reversed its position and once more shot aloft.

" Up an' down," said Officer McGuiness. " Ye've foine control an' quite a lot of speed, an' that was a grand exhibition. But finish th' trip th' next time. I've seen enough of yer tricks."

There followed a breathless interval and then a gasping response drifted faintly downward. " I c-a-a-a-an't!"

" Huh?" Officer McGuiness began to feel the least bit annoyed. He began to entertain a suspicion that this night-hawk was making sport of a member of the police. At the least he was denying what Danny had actually seen with his own good eyes. " Ye can't can't ye?" he remarked at length. " Well, th' way ut looked to me ye started all right."

" Yes, an' if I'd 'a' kept on, you dub, I'd a broke my neck."

" Shmall loss an' ye had," said Danny, his anger rising at the other man's form of address. " An' 'tis not all noight I hov to stand here watchin' ye act like a bloomin' bat."

" Who's actin'?" It was a snarl that answered. " If you think I'm doin' this for

my health, you got even less sense than th' average cop. I tell you—"

"That's enough. You don't need to tell me nuthin'." Officer McGuiness's outraged dignity came to his aid. "You're under arrest."

"Oh, am I?" Apparently the man in the air was inclined to dispute the patrolman.

"Ye are." Danny stood by his statement none the less.

"Then why don't you come up and get me?"

"Because I ain't no rubber ball." It was a taunt and nothing else, and Danny knew it, but he didn't know exactly what to do about it. He shifted his position, moving in until he stood close beside the porch.

It was a most amazing situation by which he was faced. It offered obstacles he didn't see just how to overcome. He might call the fire department and get the extension-tower, but—that would ruin the professor's lawn. He might shoot the defiant captive, and yet he doubted if such action on his part would be considered as justified. There might be a question as to whether or no a man's floating up in the air constituted resisting arrest.

He had been taught that an officer should always keep cool. Only it was hard to keep cool in the face of such an amazing situation. Once more he scratched his head and eyed the figure between himself and the moon. The odd thing was the fellow didn't go any higher or even try to swim off. That was another thing that Danny couldn't understand. In fact, he couldn't understand anything that had happened during the last fifteen minutes. The whole thing was a bit too much for his brain.

"How do you do ut?" he asked at length.

"I don't do it, you square-head." The flying man disclaimed all hint at a personal prowess.

"Oh, don't you?" A fine scorn crept into Danny's tones. "Then I should loike to know who does."

"I don't know, dang it," gibbered the other's voice. "You started it yourself, comin' up on me like you did. There was something on the roof, I tell you. I laid down in it when you yelled at me. I felt it, it was sticky. I got it on my clothes—"

"On th' roof?" Danny interrupted with a flash of understanding. He knew considerable about Xenophon Zapt. He had even been mixed up once or twice in his experiments, quite outside his own intent. And this was the professor's house, and the fellow had just said that there was something on the roof of the porch, and—

"Yes. It stuck to me when I laid down, an' it's keepin' me up here, I guess. If I lay on my face I'm all right, but I start fallin' as soon as I turn on my back. Here's some of the danged stuff, if you want a closer look." Something whistled through the air and hit the spot where Danny had been standing.

But Danny wasn't there. As the other man spoke he had ducked and stepped aside. And straightway he became conscious of two things at once. The man had sunk a trifle nearer the earth after throwing down whatever it was he had scraped from his clothing, and—there was something the matter with his, Officer McGuiness's, foot.

It was exhibiting a most remarkable inclination to rise into the air despite Danny's efforts to keep it on the ground—it was throwing him off his balance. Instinctively he hopped sidewise to save himself from falling, landed his one sane foot in what might have been a mass of soft mud on the grass under the eaves of the porch and became aware that it also had gone wild.

At once Officer Dan McGuiness found himself in a most bewildering case. He had large feet, powerful, tireless in the path of duty, and the soles of his shoes were of a large expanse. Yet, strangely enough now, those heavy feet seemed to have taken on a quality positively airy.

Strive as he would they refused to remain on the grass. In desperation he essayed a step and found himself unable to thrust either leg or foot downward to a contact with the earth. Still struggling against belief he repeated the endeavor with the other foot and found himself mounting to the level of the porch roof. Then and then only did realization and acceptance of the situation come upon him.

"Whu-roo!" He gave vent to a full-toned Irish shout of comprehension and continued his progress aloft.

Inside the house as that shout woke the echoes of the night, Miss Zapt pricked her pretty ears. "Bob," she said sharply, "what was that?"

"Sounded like a yell or a battle-cry or something," Sargent made answer. "I've had a notion I heard voices outside for the past few minutes. Maybe I'd better find out."

He rose, and Nellie followed him into the hall. He opened the door and they both stepped out on the porch.

At first they saw nothing, and then a gruff voice drifted to them: "Lie sthill, ye spalpeen. Ye tould me to come an' git ye an', begob, I hov. Quit yer squirmin' or I'll bust yer bean wid me club."

"Bob!" Miss Zapt seized her companion's arm. She had recognized those stentorian tones: "That's Officer McGuiness. They—they must be on the roof."

"Probably." Sargent went down the porch steps before he lifted his eyes, and then he, too, gasped at what he beheld and his voice came a bit unsteady. "Good Lord, Nellie! Look at that!"

He lifted an arm and pointed to where Danny, treading air very much as a man treads water, was endeavoring to still the struggles of a human figure sprawled out wierdly with its face to the earth.

Miss Zapt took one glance at the spectacle above her and shrieked: "Bob—they'll be killed!"

There came the click of the gate and a little man with iron-gray whiskers and a flapping frock-coat came up the walk.

"Ahem," he said rather dryly, "just what is the meaning of so excitable a statement? Who will be killed, may I ask?"

"Officer McGuiness and — somebody else," Nellie stammered.

"Eh?" Professor Zapt stared, out of his near-sighted eyes. "Indeed? I fail to perceive any indications of an impending tragedy myself. Where are they?"

"There!" Once more Sargent pointed aloft.

"Huh?" The professor tilted back his head as Bob's arm rose. "God bless my soul!" he exclaimed and stared through at least fifteen seconds of contemplation before he raised his voice in a question: "Officer McGuiness, exactly how did you get up there?"

Danny may have sensed the presence of those beneath him, but if so he had thus far given no sign. Now, however, he managed to snap the handcuffs on his man, tilted his head and shot a glance at the earth.

"An' is ut you, professor?" he replied. "Shure, an' if it is how I got up here yer askin' why I walked, though barrin' th' fact how I done ut I dunno, except that after this poorch-climbin' beauty floated offen yer roof when I tould him to come down, I stepped into somethin' on th' grass an' found mesilf endowed wid th' ability of follerin' after, belike because of whativer it was I had got on me fate. An' 'tis not so much how I got up is troublin' me now, as how I shall git down wid th' burd I've caught."

"Remarkable — actually remarkable!" said Professor Xenophon Xerxes Zapt. "Officer, this is most amazing. Let me think—let me think." He made his way to the porch steps and found himself a seat.

"If I moight be suggestin', sor, don't be thinkin' too long at present." Danny's voice came down in the tone of a plaint. "'Tis tiresome work entirely, this walkin' on air. 'Tis not an angel I am as yet, an' there is nothin' to sit on at all, at all, an' th' steady movement is tirin' on th' legs."

"Then stop it," said the professor in a manner of impatience. "Keep your feet still and float." He began pulling at his graying whiskers as though minded to tear them out by the roots. Presently he hopped up, trotted a few steps down the walk, lifted his eyes to the laboratory windows and nodded. And then he turned to Bob and Nellie. "Did it rain here to-night?"

"It did," Bob declared.

"Wind—preceding the shower?"

"Lots of it at first."

"That explains it," said Xenophon Xerxes Zapt.

"Glad of it—" Bob began.

The professor gave him a glance. "*If* you will kindly let me finish my remarks. As I told you I would, I prepared a quan-

tity of the Paste Powder the other day and left it when I departed this morning to catch a train. In my haste I forgot to close the windows. The wind blew the powder upon the roof and the rain converted it into the paste and washed some of it off on the lawn—"

"If yer quite done thinkin', professor, sor," Officer McGuiness interrupted, "would you moind tellin' me how to get down?"

"Eh?" Xenophon Zapt jerked up his head to view the patrolman and his captive. "Oh, yes—yes—certainly. That's simple. You have the substance merely on your feet?"

"Yes, sor."

"Then hold them up."

"Hould thim up? Hould thim up where?" Danny's tones were growing a trifle excited. "If I try houldin' up my fate, I'll be losin' my balance an' breakin' my—"

"Exactly." Professor Zapt's voice grew crisp. "Take hold of your prisoner, bend your legs at the knees, so as to elevate the soles of your shoes and let gravity do the rest. Robert—go turn on the hose that we may wash the paste off the officer's feet when he reaches the ground. He's all mussed up."

Bob departed, running on his errand. By the time he was back Danny had effected a landing and was kneeling on the grass with his captive stretched out on his back within reach.

Inside five minutes the paste was removed from McGuiness's feet and he stood erect.

"Shure, an' 'tis wonderful stuff, professor," he began after he had taken a deep breath of relief. "An' what moight you call th' same?"

"Zap's Repulsive Paste," said the professor. "It robs anybody placed above it of weight."

"What do ye think of that now?" Officer Dan exclaimed. "But 'tis no more than th' truth yer spakin'. I've had an example of its effects myself. Oh, would ye!"

He broke off and sprang, snatching into the air to grip and drag back the form of his prisoner, who in the momentary distraction of conversation had managed to roll himself on his face.

Danny slammed him down none too gently, it must be confessed. "Lie there now, ye human balloon," he admonished in a growl, "or I'll make ye more repulsive than any kind of paste ye ever saw. If ye think I'm going to let Spur Heel Eddie slip out of my fingers, once they grip him—"

"Spur Heel Eddie?" Sargent repeated in excitement. "McGuiness, is that right?"

"Roight ut is—dead roight, Misther Sargent," Danny chuckled. "Shure, an' 'tis a foine noight's wuruk. He's th' burd we've been sort of thinkin' was behindt all these here burgularies th' last two weeks, an'—"

"And you caught him trying to burglarize my house." Professor Zapt's fingers slipped inside his coat. They came out with something crisp. "Officer, let me express my appreciation of your fidelity to duty."

"Thank ye, sor." Danny deftly pocketed the "appreciation" without removing his watchful eye from Eddie. "As I was sayin', McGuiness niver shirks his duty, an' 'tis a foine noight's wuruk."

"I'll go in and telephone for the wagon," suggested Bob.

"Don't trouble, sor," said Danny. "Begorra, I'll be takin' him in myself."

Stooping, he rolled Eddie face downward, seized him securely by the slack of the trousers and started to walk with him across the grass.

"Ye'll notice that wid all this Repulsive Paste smeared on him, if I carry him loike this he hasn't any weight at all," he announced from the gate.

"Exactly. You're a man of intelligence, McGuiness." Xenophon Xerxes Zapt turned to enter his house. "Good night."

"Good night, sor," Officer McGuiness made answer.

"Good night," Bob echoed with a chuckle as he watched Eddie, literally held fast by the strong arm of the law, born off down the tree-shaded street until he disappeared.

Professor Zapt whirled upon him. "The occasion is not one of levity, Robert," he remarked in decidedly acid tones.

"No, sir. Merely of levitation," said Bob.

Gray Dusk

by Octavus Roy Cohen

Author of "The Crimson Alibi" etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

DAVID CARROLL, the detective who solved the mystery of "The Crimson Alibi" (ALL-STORY WEEKLY, December 28, 1918—January 25, 1919), received a telegram from his old friend, Stanford Forrest, saying that Mary, Forrest's bride of a few days, had been murdered in a bungalow owned by a mutual friend, Franklin Furness, a writer, near Karnack, a small town in South Carolina, where the newlyweds were spending their honeymoon; and that he was in jail, accused of committing the crime. He asked Carroll to help him, and that night the detective and Sullivan, his assistant, started for Karnack.

Before her marriage to Forrest, Mary Carmody had been a vaudeville actress, and had appeared in an act financed by Bennet Hemingway, a wealthy man who had once come between Mary and Forrest.

In Karnack public feeling ran high against Forrest, and Sheriff Potter had been forced to arrest him, although he thought him innocent. All that Potter knew of the case was that Forrest had come to Karnack with his wife's body in his arms, in a car driven by Carter, his servant. Mary had been killed by a blow in the neck, delivered with an ice-pick. The detectives were taken to the jail by Mart Farnam, a "swamp-angel" of unprepossessing appearance, and Potter allowed them to see Forrest alone. From the prisoner Carroll learned that:

From Charleston Forrest had sent Carter to Furness Lodge, on the Santee River, a few miles from Karnack, to prepare it for them. The place showed signs of recent occupancy, Carter said on his return. Next day Forrest, Mary and Carter had gone to the Lodge, by way of Karnack, where Forrest had received some letters, among them one from Hemingway, accusing Mary of improper relations with him before her marriage to Forrest. This letter had been mailed in Columbia on October 8. Forrest had not shown it to his bride, he said. Carter had been sent back to Karnack for provisions, and while Mary had started to prepare dinner her husband had gone to the river to fish. At six o'clock she had come to him for a trunk-key. When he returned to the Lodge a half-hour later he found her dead, lying on the kitchen floor in a pool of blood.

Carroll suspected Hemingway. From gossip he learned that he had been in Karnack on the sixth, looking up the deed to the Furness property, and that Conrad Heston, "the feller that bought the place from Furness, never had his deed recorded," although he had been living in the Lodge for months. Heston lived alone and seemed to have plenty of money, and it was thought that he came from Newark, New Jersey. Carroll wired Furness, who was in the West, asking if he had sold the Lodge, and received a reply that he had not. He wired again, asking if Furness knew Heston.

Farnam drove Carroll and Sullivan to the Lodge, within a few miles of which he lived. They learned that Farnam hated Heston because the latter had been intimate with Esther Devarney, who lived in the swamp, but who was a girl of beauty and education. Farnam was in love with her, but she would have nothing to do with him. Farnam said that he had seen Heston in the woods near the lodge at about five o'clock of the afternoon of the murder.

On the steps leading to the kitchen the detectives found two bloody foot-prints, evidently made by the murderer when escaping. Mary had evidently been preparing dinner when attacked, and had been stabbed from behind. On the floor they found a valuable engagement-ring, with the initials "G. R. A." engraved inside it. Forrest said that he had never seen this ring. They then visited Farnam's cabin, and from there went to the cabin that Heston owned on the river-bank, but the place was locked. Carroll phoned the sheriff to arrest Heston if he came to Karnack.

They visited the Devarney home, and from Esther's father learned that Heston had called there at nine o'clock on the morning of the murder, looking for Esther, who had gone to Charleston to shop. She returned that afternoon, and at about five o'clock started for the Lodge to meet Heston, returning at about seven.

Esther tried to shield Heston. She said that she had been with him at half-past six on the afternoon of the crime, in his cabin near the river—not the Lodge. She said, also, that she had visited the Lodge at a little after six and had seen nothing out of the ordinary. When Carroll showed her the ring, she claimed it, crying: "That is my ring! Conrad gave it to me, *and I lost it at the Lodge.*"

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for November 8.

CHAPTER XIII.

GRAY DUSK.

SILENCE fell upon the group. All eyes were fastened on the figure of the girl, bosom heaving with fierce emotion, eyes dilated with the light of desperation. But with her acknowledgment of ownership of the ring she quitted gradually, as though the confession was a load removed from her shapely shoulders.

"When did you lose it there, Miss Esther?"

"Several days ago!"

"Before the ninth?"

"Yes. The sixth or seventh, I believe."

Seth Devarney, a quaint dignity in his manner, broke into the conversation. His booming voice was repressed, there was infinite sadness in his manner.

"Ye've been a visitin' this man at the lodge, Essie?"

"Yes, father."

"That ben't no seemly way for a Devarney girl to act."

"It was all right, father. I'm engaged to marry him."

"No, darter—ye ain't engaged to marry Conrad Heston. He hasn't spoken to me about it."

"He wanted to," she defended intensely, "he begged me to let him speak to you. But I wouldn't."

"Why?"

"Because he wasn't in a position to marry me now—and I knew you would never understand."

Devarney shook his head heavily. "No, I'm afraid I wouldn't understand that sort of a man. A man ain't got no right to be speakin' of love to a gal if he cain't marry her. I'm right sorry ye've been so foolish, Essie—"

"There was nothing wrong, daddy—"

Tears sprang to his eyes at her use of the affectionate child-name. "No, darter; there was nothin' wrong. Y'r daddy knows that. But ye was pow'ful indiscreet. I want ye to be honest with Mr. Carroll here. I think it will be best for ye."

"Thanks, Mr. Devarney," said the detective. "Tell me, Miss Esther, don't you know that Heston is not his real name?"

She shook her head. "I won't lie to you, Mr. Carroll—it's no use now. But I can't answer that question."

"That's tantamount to an admission. We'll let it drop. Where is Heston now?"

"I don't know."

"Aren't you equivocating, Miss Esther."

"I—I—don't know *exactly* where he is."

"He's on his way to Karnak, isn't he?"

"I—I—can't say."

"You still insist that you were at Furness Lodge a little after six o'clock on the afternoon of the ninth?"

"Yes, I was there."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"What did you go there for?"

"To hunt for that ring."

"How did you happen to lose it there?"

"My engagement to Heston was a secret, and so I wore the ring around my neck on a ribbon. I lost it several days before that and knew it must have been at the lodge because I missed it shortly after leaving there."

"So." Carroll was speaking in a soothing voice. He was striving for the girl's confidence. "You saw no one at the place?"

"No one."

"If Mrs. Forrest's body had been lying before the ice-box would you have seen it?"

"Yes. The screen door opens inward toward the ice-box and I could not have failed to see it."

"Was your arrival at the lodge your first intimation that it was occupied?"

"Yes."

"You met no one on your way to the lodge?"

"No one except Mart Farnam."

"Where was he?"

"Walking toward his cabin. He'd evidently been to Nixon's. He had been drinking."

"Does the road from Nixon's to his cabin pass the lodge?"

"Yes."

"Did he say anything to you about strangers beings there?"

"No. I've told you the first I knew of it was when I got there and saw signs of its occupation."

"Did Farnam speak to you at all?"

Her face flushed. "Yes."

Carroll eyed her keenly. "You're not very fond of him, are you, Miss Esther?"

"No! I loathe him. I—I—told him so."

"That afternoon?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He—he—" Her cheeks became scarlet. "He spoke nastily about Mr. Heston and me, and said I—had disgraced myself."

"And you—"

"I slapped his face and walked on. He was drunk."

"And you are convinced that he didn't know there was any one at the lodge?"

"I am sure. He would have mentioned it if he'd known. Mart always tells what he knows."

"After you left the lodge and walked down the river-path toward Heston's own cabin, did you meet any one?"

"No."

"Did you see any one at Furness Lodge—even at a distance?"

"No."

"How long were you in the lodge?"

"Only about three minutes. I entered the back veranda and walked through the dog-trot. By that time I was sure that something was wrong. I left through the front door and struck right through the trees to my right toward Mr. Heston's cabin."

"He was there when you got there?"

"Yes. He had just been fishing. He had a string of fish with him."

"He seemed quiet and calm?"

"Yes. Oh! I'm sure, Mr. Carroll, that he'd been nowhere near the lodge."

"He knew that the folks were there, didn't he?"

"Yes—he had known it since the previous day. He says their chauffeur came out with some supplies, and had trouble with his car about a mile from the lodge. Mr. Heston then had time to remove his belongings from the lodge to the cabin before the man arrived there, and he watched from then on."

"And the explanation Heston gave you about his sudden flight, he gave in confidence?"

The girl flashed him a grateful glance. "Yes, sir, in confidence."

Carroll rose. "I'm very much obliged, Miss Esther. I'm sorry you found it necessary to mislead me for a while at the beginning, but I understand now. I hope things will turn out all right."

"You don't think he had anything to do with it, Mr. Carroll?" she questioned pleadingly. "You don't think that, do you?"

"I can't say that, Miss Esther," he answered gravely. "My very best friend—Stanford Forrest—has been arrested for that crime, and I am quite as convinced of his innocence as you are of the innocence of your fiancé. But the fact remains that some one did it—and it is my duty to find that some one."

"But he wasn't even there—"

"I hope for your sake that he was not. But if your story is strictly true some one visited that cabin between the time you left and a little before seven. I don't understand things yet—and when you see Heston, or get in touch with him, you might beg him to do nothing foolish if he is really innocent. There is very little danger to an innocent man—"

"But you don't understand—" she started, and then bit her lip abruptly.

He turned toward the girl's stricken parents. "And you, Mr. and Mrs. Devarney, I wouldn't worry about this daughter of yours. I think I've gathered a good bit of the truth and she's helped me a good deal. For the benefit of every one concerned, I'd suggest that you say nothing to any one about this conversation. I'm going to count on all of you as allies—and we'll see if we can't pull together and right this thing."

"Thanks," rumbled Devarney heavily. "I'd be pow'ful sorry for my gal if you could prove it on Heston, Mr. Carroll; but I b'lieve you're honest—an' ef he really done it, it's better she should know it now."

Gray dusk had fallen over the swamp when they left the cabin: the merging of October day with night—a pall-like blanket of coming darkness that threw the landscape into a gray monotone. The wastes waked to raucous night-life: the chorusing

of frogs, the shrilling of myriad crickets. They found Carter sitting impassively in the big touring-car, oblivious to the stares of the pickaninnies who prodded the big tires with grimy little black fingers.

Carroll lightly tossed them a few pennies and laughed at their vociferously scrambling. One tow-headed little tot wept mournfully when the scramble was over and he had gained no booty. Carroll pressed a bright, new quarter into his hand and the little fellow streaked down the road toward his cabin as though fearful that the white folks might reconsider.

Carroll ordered the car back to Furness Lodge, and as it rolled into the swamps from the settlement, its powerful headlights piercing the fast-gathering gloom, he settled himself against the deep upholstery.

Thought! He wanted time for thought! Time to connect up the various stories which had come to him in the past two days. The thing seemed to grow more complex the deeper he delved into it. But try as he might, he could not rid himself of the obsession of Heston's guilt. He mentioned as much to Sullivan, welcoming the combating, revivifying influence of his assistant's agile brain.

"Heston?" answered Sullivan. "It does look like him—superficially."

"But you are thinking—"

"There's one fact that struck me as truthful in all her story," answered Sullivan: "Just one thing which I am willing to accept as cold, stark fact—and it isn't very pleasant to consider."

"What is it?"

"Just this," came the quiet answer. "*Esther Devarney was at Furness Lodge just about the time the murder was committed!*"

Carroll was silent.

"She admits that," pursued Sullivan, "and the thing impressed itself upon me to the exclusion of almost everything else. I like the girl, and I should hate to have a motive against her thrust before me. The conclusion would point inevitably to her."

"Heston may have been with her."

"He probably was. But that would convict both instead of acquitting her. Oh, I don't say she did it—but when you know that in all your investigation—especially if we insist on believing Forrest's story—when we know that there was one person on the scene at the time of the murder, we must not discard that person as a suspect."

"Quite right, Jim. But I can't believe it—"

"And I don't want to, David. But facts are facts. The girl lied to shield Heston. Might it not be that she was afraid you would be able to prove that she was there and so implicate him by his presence on the scene of the crime, and that to save that she admitted her own presence there?"

"It could be. But, good Lord, Jim, did you ever see any one look less the murderess?"

"Yes!"

Carroll looked up in surprise. "You think she showed guilt?"

"Undoubtedly," returned Sullivan. "Not necessarily guilt of murder—but certainly guilty knowledge. Of course she knows the truth about Heston."

"Certainly. Which leads me to believe that Heston has played pretty straight with her."

"But has this ever occurred to you, David; you whose mind seems to have stagnated through your personal interest in Stanford Forrest—has it ever occurred to you that if, as we presume, Heston is a crook, and if she knows all about him and still defends him and admits her love for him—that her attitude indicates a greater or less degree of moral turpitude?"

"Yes—I had thought of that, Jim."

"She loves the man. You can read it in every word, every gesture. If she knew he had committed the murder, she would lie to shield him."

"Undoubtedly. But, Jim, doesn't it strike you that where she would be calm and self-possessed, if she were shielding him, she would be likely to be unnerved were she the guilty person?"

Sullivan nodded. "A good point. But criminal psychology is so peculiar: the commission of a crime gives to the average person a cunning theretofore foreign to their nature. You've run across the phenomena a thousand times. Hello!" he broke off suddenly. "Here we are at the lodge."

The car swung slowly up the magnificent approach to the lodge, which was illumined in the glare of the head-lamps. They purred slowly toward the veranda — then Carter let the gears out, clapped on the emergency brake and the car stopped. The men alighted.

Once inside the lodge they washed up, and with Carter's assistance skirmished about for a meal. The table was set in short order. But scarcely had they settled themselves to gustatory enjoyment when the telephone in the living-room jangled insistently: two short rings, followed by two long ones.

He reached the telephone in a few strides and placed the receiver to his ear, where, true to custom, he heard the clicking of other instruments along the general line. "Hello!"

The deep, resonant voice of Sheriff Potter came to his ears. "Hello! That you, Carroll?"

"Yes."

"I've been trying to get you for the last hour. Remember the friend you asked me about?"

"Heston?"

"Yes; what about him?"

"He tried to get away from here on the seven o'clock train. I nabbed him, and he's in jail awaiting your orders!"

CHAPTER XIV.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

SULLIVAN was eying Carroll peculiarly as the latter turned from the telephone. He spread his hands wide in a gesture of surrender. "Score one for you, David."

"That wasn't hard," smiled Carroll easily. "It was a foregone conclusion that he would try to get away. It doesn't necessarily connect him with the murder, although it does establish the fact that he isn't anxious to run foul of professional detectives. However, Potter will hold him until morning on a vagrancy charge, and I'll give him the double-o then."

"And your other plans?"

"Not very well formulated. For one thing, we shall go directly to his cabin in the morning and give it a thorough search."

They turned in early that night, their ears very readily becoming attuned to the anodynic hum of the swamps. Only once did Carroll wake, and that was as a stern-wheel river steamer passed down stream, puffing and snorting and splashing the red, muddy waters of the Santee.

Things were very peaceful at Furness Lodge—very peaceful and very quiet. The first rays of the morning sun found the three men awake and washing with gusto under the yard pump.

The air was cool and bracing with just sufficient tang to send the blood coursing turbulently through their veins. A breakfast of eggs, coffee, and crackers, followed by a few persimmons which the watchful Carter had found, satisfied them, and they set out for Heston's cabin at the bend of the river.

They found it readily enough, padlocked as they had left it the previous afternoon. It was the work of only a moment to pry out the hasp with a tire-tool from the automobile, and Carroll and Sullivan stepped inside, the latter throwing back the solid board screens which, bolted from the inside, covered the four windows.

The cabin was excessively neat within. Chintz curtains covered the windows. On a rude center table were a few well-selected books by authors known to the world of science: Freud, Ellis, Bloch — novels and plays by Turgenev, Artzibashef, Ibsen, Gorky, Maupassant, Dreiser, Hardy.

An iron cot was in the far corner, and opposite it a large packing case converted into a kitchen cabinet. A kerosene stove near by indicated the method used for cooking. There was little other furniture save a few crude chairs. But everything was neat and clean, and a few half-dead flowers in a cheap glass vase indicated a woman's touch.

Carroll inspected the room closely. The books he lingered over for some time, inspecting the flyleafs. A corner had been torn from each: it was evident that the owner had thus sought to conceal his identity. The written names had been torn out. But the books plainly indicated a man of culture and considerable depth.

The room showed nothing. And finally the two men paused before the well-made trunk in the corner. Without a word, Carroll broke the lock with his sharp-edged tire-tool. The lid flung back and the tray removed disclosed an array of tailored, expensive clothing: even to full evening equipment.

Obviously the man who had assumed the name of Conrad Heston had not been wanting in the goods of this world. Every garment bespoke affluence. Silk shirts, flannel suits for summer; heavy tweeds and serges; expensive, tailored underwear; silk pajamas: the clothes of a man of taste and discernment—and means.

Garment by garment Carroll removed the clothes from the trunk, piling them neatly that they might be returned without too great disarrangement. It was not until he reached the bottom of the trunk—after discovering that every tailor's tag had been carefully cut from the clothes—that he found anything worth while.

And that was a photograph; a photograph of a very pretty girl which gave evidence of having originally been in a frame from which it had been carefully removed. The photograph was under a blotter-sheet in a small leather secretary; evidently put there months, or perhaps years, before—and forgotten: a case of out of sight out of mind.

But it was not the high forehead, the mass of brown hair, the perfect features of the pretty woman which attracted Carroll. Rather it was the reverse side. For there, as he proudly exhibited to Jim Sullivan, was an inscription in the clear, well-formed chirography of a woman:

"To George, with a heart full of love from—Katherine Carr!"

Sullivan whistled expressively. "Katherine Carr!" he ejaculated. "The initials K. C. on the ring you found!"

"Yes. And the George probably stands for the first of the man's initials: G. R. A. Quite evidently our Heston is named George, and was once engaged to a Miss Katherine Carr, of Newark, New Jersey."

Sullivan looked up in surprise. "What makes you say Newark?"

"The photographer's name," came the prompt answer as Carroll indicated the impression with his forefinger. "'Rantoul—Newark, New Jersey.' Obviously no person living within twenty-five or thirty minutes of New York would patronize a Newark photographer unless that person was a resident of Newark and believed in fostering home industry."

Sullivan nodded. "Right again. You're becoming your normal self, David. What now?"

"First we'll get these things back in the trunk. Then we'll drive to Karnack. If Mr. Conrad Heston doesn't give us any information, I'll send you to Newark tonight to get an interview with Miss Katherine Carr. You can find her somewhere: if not in the city of Newark, then in one of its suburbs—the Oranges, Montclair, Passaic—perhaps even Elizabeth."

Less than two hours later they bumped across the railroad tracks which mark the actual eastern boundary of Karnack, and braked to a stop before the red-brick courthouse. Carroll found Sheriff Potter lolling back in a swivel chair in his office, frankly perusing the litigation merits of a summons and complaint which had been turned over to him for service. He was arguing the case pro and con with Peter Royce when Carroll entered, and, much to that masculine gossip's discomfiture, insisted on chasing him back to his own sanctum at the other end of the musty building. And then Potter explained briefly and clearly his arrest of Conrad Heston.

"North-bound train came in, and just as it did he came from Gilroy's store across yonder and tried to get on from the other side. He had a suit-case with him, and I nabbed him. I had been looking for just such a move, provided your suspicions were not entirely incorrect.

"He was nervous, but attempted an attitude of shocked surprise. Didn't make any very strenuous objections against being held: just wanted to know the charge, and as I didn't want to expose your hand by chalking murder up against him—I made it vagrancy. Being a city man, he didn't realize that I have no right to hold him on that charge—and I've got him safe and sound."

"That's great, Potter," enthused Carroll heartily. "And now may I chat with him?"

Potter waved his hand easily. "Go to it, son. And tiptoe past old Royce's door while you're on your way. I don't want that old pest back here. I need a nap."

Carroll stopped by Stanford Forrest's cell just long enough to report progress without going into details. He found his friend haggard and showing the effects of undernourishment and gnawing grief. Then he made his way to the cell occupied by Conrad Heston. Orrin Kinney, the jailer, let the two detectives into the cell, and then reluctantly made his way down the corridor and out of earshot.

Carroll was not surprised at Heston's physical appearance. His foreknowledge of the man had prepared him for just about what he saw: a man of about thirty years of age, well groomed, clean shaven, medium height, with light hair and level blue eyes. An air of gentility radiated from the prisoner—something akin to dignity permeated his manner. His face was not that of the criminal in any way: his expression merely one of hurt and fear. It was he who spoke first.

"Well?"

"You know who we are?" asked Carroll.

"Yes"—bitterly—"friends of Stanford Forrest determined to free him of a charge of which he is undoubtedly guilty." His tone was low, his bearing reserved.

"Not quite, Mr. Heston. We merely want to find the guilty man."

"It is, of course, needless for me to assure you that I am not he."

"You deny guilt?"

"Certainly. But you expected that."

"Yes—I expected a plea of innocence." Carroll admired the man's self-possession. "We merely wished to question you—"

"I have nothing to say."

"It is for your own interest, if you are innocent—"

"I prefer to be the judge of that, Mr. Carroll."

The detective shrugged. He made his next question as casual as possible, but his narrow-lidded eyes were watching every play of facial expression.

"When did you last see Miss Katherine Carr?"

Heston's face twitched spasmodically. He controlled himself with a visible effort. "I do not know of whom you are speaking," he answered in a low voice.

"You are sure?"

"Yes."

The man was lying, and both Carroll and Sullivan knew it. To the latter's surprise, Carroll did not press his point.

"Why have you assumed an *alias*, Mr. Heston?"

"My name is Conrad Heston."

"Haven't you dropped a 'George' from your name?"

Again that light of startled fear leaped into the eyes of the cornered man. "My name is Conrad Heston."

Carroll shrugged, and again took another tack: "So much for that, then, if you insist. When did you leave Newark—and why?"

"I have never been in Newark."

"Don't you realize," said Carroll with sudden earnestness, "that these lies are involving you deeper and deeper. Can't you see from my questions that I *know* you are not truthful with me?"

"I will take my chances," came the dogged response. In spite of himself, Carroll admired the other's poise.

"Where is your deed to Furness Lodge?"

"You know as well as I do that I never bought it—that I had no right there."

"You knew Furness pretty well, though, didn't you?"

"No." Again the telltale expression that denoted the lie.

"How long did you know Mary Carmody—Mrs. Forrest?"

"I never set eyes on her in my life," was his reply.

"You knew Stanford Forrest, though; didn't you."

"I knew *of* him. You can prove that I didn't know him personally by the sheriff. He stopped me at Forrest's cell when he arrested me and Forrest admitted he had never seen me before."

"Mrs. Forrest cannot clear you in that way—unfortunately."

"Unfortunately," came the echo from the prisoner.

"At least you will not deny knowing Miss Esther Devarney, will you?"

A long pause; "I guess there'd be no use denyin' that."

"And that you are engaged to her."

"I deny that."

"Even after her admission?"

"Listen here, Carroll; I'm not a weakling nor a mental imbecile. I'll not be tricked by third degree methods—"

"Have it your way. I cannot force you to answer my questions. But maybe you might care to tell me where you and she were at six o'clock on the afternoon of the ninth?"

"I was not with her."

"At six-thirty or thereabouts?"

"I don't care to say."

"Well, I know that about that time she was with you at your cabin near the bend of the Santee. I also know that shortly before that time, and just about the hour of dusk when the murder was committed, that Esther Devarney was at Furness Lodge!"

For one instant Heston stood rigid with horror. Then he leaped across the cell and sank powerful fingers deeply into Carroll's shoulders: "Good God! man, you're not thinking that she—that she—killed Mrs. Forrest? You're not suspecting her of that?"

"I take my cue from you, Heston. That is one question *I* will not answer. But she admits that she was there."

He shook his head. "I don't believe it . . . .I don't believe she told you any such thing."

"Believe what you like. Thus far I have established the fact that she was there just about the time the murder was committed. Are you quite sure you were not with her?"

"I—I—don't wrack me, Carroll. I'm not going to tell you anything: not a thing."

"Not even why you tried to make a getaway?"

"No."

"Nor what your real name is?"

"It is Conrad Heston."

Carroll rose. "I'm afraid we can't get together, Heston; and I'm sure you're only injuring yourself. Oh! by the way—" he turned suddenly and extended his hand, palm uppermost, toward Heston. In his palm glittered the diamond ring he had found at the Lodge. "When did you lose this?"

Heston swallowed with difficulty. His answer came in a voice harsh and dry:

"I—I—never lost it. I have never—seen it—before."

Carroll pocketed the ring calmly. "Very good. However, your denial doesn't bother me:—you see, Miss Devarney says that you gave her that as an engagement ring and that she lost it at Furness Lodge!"

He turned and beckoned Orrin Kinney. And as they started down the corridor he caught a fleeting glimpse of Heston; Heston staring rigidly after him with a look of fixed terror on his rather handsome face!

That night Jim Sullivan left on the limited for Newark.

CHAPTER XV.

HEMINGWAY'S ALIBI.

THE following morning David Carroll closeted himself with Sheriff Potter with whom he had a long and serious talk, as the result of which the northbound train leaving Karnack at ten o'clock found Carroll aboard, bound for Columbia; Heston in the personal custody of the gray-eyed sheriff.

Since the realization that Bennet Hemingway, erstwhile rival with Stanford Forrest for the hand of Mary Carmody, had been in Columbia on the day preceding the murder; Carroll had been unable to rid himself of the idea that Hemingway was connected in some way with the crime, and he was now taking advantage of Sullivan's absence on another trail to discover Hemingway's whereabouts on the day when Mary had been killed.

He arrived in Columbia at one o'clock and chartered a rickety taxicab for a round of the hotels. He went first to the city's leading hostelry on the other end of Main Street, near the postoffice, and there his quest ended so far as Columbia's hotels were concerned, for on the register, in handwriting unmistakably Hemingway's, he found the signature.

The day clerk remembered Hemingway distinctly; a slender man, too well dressed, and traveling for a machinery concern in which he boasted an interest. From the clerk, Carroll secured a list of the machinery companies in the city which Hemingway would have been most likely to visit, and he made the rounds.

The trail was exceedingly easy to follow. At the office of the Columbia Cotton Gin and Machinery Company he found the general manager who remembered giving a good sized order to Hemingway about four o'clock on the afternoon of the eighth, and he also remembered Hemingway saying that he would leave for Florence the following morning.

Carroll returned to the hotel, every movement of his man on the eighth accounted for, and consulted the records. He learned that Hemingway had checked out at 3:30 on the morning of the ninth on the Florence train. Carroll left Columbia shortly before three o'clock and arrived in Florence at five in the afternoon. He found Hemingway's autograph on the register of the Florence hotel under date of the ninth and the records showed that he had arrived before breakfast that morning.

The clerk did not recall Hemingway, but shamefacedly confessed that he had a poor memory for faces. He referred Carroll to several companies dealing in cotton gin equipment and at the second of these Carroll located his man. The firm, it seemed, had placed an order with Hemingway's firm some time before and it had been delayed in transshipment at Charleston. Hemingway, said this man had promised to leave for Charleston on the one o'clock afternoon train.

Carroll then sought the dispatcher who assured him that insofar as he could remember the train in question—one of the New York-Florida flyers—had not stopped at Karnack on its southbound run. Much puzzled and almost convinced that his suspicions against Hemingway had been fathered by desire, Carroll dined in Florence and left that bustling little metropolis on the 8.40 train.

He arrived in Charleston at eleven o'clock and was driven to an austere hotel on Meeting Street. The records destroyed his last hope—they and a talk with the chief clerk.

Bennet Hemingway had registered there at about four o'clock in the afternoon. Investigation disclosed the fact that if that were the case, he could not have caught the local to Karnack in time to have been there at 6.30, at which hour Mary Forrest had been killed.

But to make sure, Carroll made the round of the freight offices. One of the railroad clerks remembered Hemingway who, it seemed, had been rather officious and unpleasant in his demands regarding the transshipment of the ginning machinery for the Florence firm. Did the clerk recall at what time Hemingway was in the office? He tapped a pencil thoughtfully against his forehead—

"Ye-e-s, I believe I do. He got here about four-thirty, and I went with him to the freight shed. He was with me until about five-thirty."

"You are quite sure?"

"Positive—I remember distinctly that it caused me to break a date with my girl."

Carroll returned to the hotel and ate a belated supper. He engaged a room, took a cold bath and seated himself on the bed. His results had been of a nature contrary to his desires. His investigation had proved only one thing: a perfect alibi for Bennet Hemingway!

Carroll was genuinely sorry. In the first place, the personal element, which had figured so largely in his conduct of the investigation, had led him to hope for Hemingway's guilt. Hemingway was the only person even remotely connected with the case in whose arrest and conviction Carroll would have taken real pleasure. But he was too honest with himself, and had been too metriculous in his investigation, to longer harbor the idea that Hemingway might have killed the bride.

The several days of mental strain and emotional stress were telling on Carroll. His face lost much of the ingenuously boyish look which so attracted people. Tiny crows-feet had appeared about the corners of the eyes and he seemed tired, and, for the moment, dispirited.

Sleep did not come easily that night. But when it did come, it was deep and dreamless. At five o'clock he was waked by the jangling of his bedside telephone and at 5.40 was munching a stack of flaccid wheatcakes and sipping a cup of scalding brown water which masqueraded under the name of coffee at a restaurant not far from Charleston's Union Station. At six o'clock his train pulled out, en route for Karnack, and he settled back in his seat in the chair-car and gazed out upon the monotonous scenery.

He reached the court-house before the arrival of the sheriff and spent a half hour in the cell with Stanford Forrest. It was a gloomy half-hour. Carroll had discovered nothing definite save that the man for whose guilt he had hoped was innocent of the crime itself, no matter how much trouble he had caused by the letter which so damningly incriminated the stricken husband.

The first wracking pain of his sudden bereavement had left Forrest. He was nonetheless a mourner, but a quiet dignity had come to sit upon his shoulders; a dignity accompanied by an extra dozen years of age which the tragedy had placed upon him.

At the outset he had not cared whether they hanged him or whether they didn't. He was more sane now, more nearly normal. In his breast there had sprung a desire for revenge; a desire to see someone brought to justice for the crime. So much, at least, he told Carroll, realizing that in his friend he had an ally whose confidence in his innocence could not be shaken by circumstances.

Eventually Carroll left his friend and stopped for a few moments by the cell door behind which Conrad Heston sat disconsolately on his iron cot. He greeted Carroll dully.

"Haven't decided to say anything?" asked the detective.

Heston shook his head. "I have nothing to say. Except," hopefully, "I'd like mighty well to see Esther Devarney."

"That's a matter for Sheriff Potter," was Carroll's answer. "I'll see him about it."

And he did. "It don't sound to me like a good idea," volunteered Potter.

"It isn't," came Carroll's answer, "from my standpoint. However, if you wish to—"

"When do you expect your friend Sullivan back from the North?"

"To-morrow or the next day."

"Wouldn't you prefer that I keep Heston and the girl apart until you hear what he has to report?"

"I'd appreciate it, Sheriff. Of course, you mustn't forget that I am acting for a particular man in this case."

Potter smiled genially. "I understand, my boy. But I think you'd come pretty close to being honest with me."

"I haven't pledged myself."

"I don't ask you to. In the first place, I'm convinced that your friend, Forrest, is innocent."

"In spite of that letter?"

"Yes—in spite of the letter."

"What makes you think that?"

"Hunch," smiled the sheriff easily. "I play 'em strong, son; when they hit me hard enough. This one did."

"I'm glad of that," returned Carroll gratefully, "I was afraid that as he is my friend I might have allowed my judgment to become warped. There's no overlooking the fact that someone murdered Mrs. Forrest, and that someone was not Bennet Hemingway."

"Not Hemingway? You are sure?"

"Positive," and Carroll detailed his investigation of the previous day.

"Good, fast work," applauded the sheriff when he finished. "Frankly, I'm about as sorry over results as you are. I'd like to see that skunk hanged higher than Haman. Have you any idea who did it? Have you got the goods against Heston?"

Carroll shook his head. "Frankly—no. Circumstantial evidence—yes. He's a crook, but I'm not at all sure that he killed Mary—Mrs. Forrest. He was there, or could have been, and his refusal to say anything is suspicious. But I tell you frankly that the only person I know was at Furness Lodge at the time of the crime, was Esther Devarney!"

Sheriff Potter passed his hands across his eyes. "That's unthinkable, Carroll."

"Just about. And yet, she admits it. And to my mind her admission means one of two things; it is either self-incriminating or is a deliberate attempt to shield Heston."

"You mean that she cares enough for him to know that he committed the murder —provided he did, of course—and throw suspicion on herself in order to free him?"

"Yes. I've seen that sort of thing before a number of times. There is such a delicate line of demarcation between whole and half truths that I'm leaving no stone unturned to find out every detail as regards the movements of every person in the case on the afternoon of the ninth."

"But you have a pretty well-informed opinion?" persisted Potter.

"Perhaps."

"Pointing to who?"

Carroll shook his head. "I'd rather not say at this stage of the game, Sheriff. I might be all wrong—and if I am I'd hate to get your mind started on the wrong track. You're of a heap more help to me as an independent thinker."

The sheriff shrugged. "Have it your own way, son. It sounds wise, but I'll be honest and admit that it's plumb tantalizing. What are your plans for to-day?"

"I'm going to get Carter to drive me out in the car. I'll either get back to town to-night or remain at the Lodge. If you need me, and I haven't shown up, you can telephone me there. Meanwhile, as I understand it, you'll let no one see Heston?"

"No one—unless he engages a lawyer. I haven't any right to keep his lawyer away."

"Good!" Carroll rose. "It isn't an easy case, sheriff—but I have hopes that we're not so very far away from a solution."

The other shook his head. "If you were to put it up to me, I'd say we were a heap farther away than when we started!"

The drive to Furness Lodge was tedious and uneventful. The sun had passed its zenith when they arrived, and Carroll and Carter made a light lunch on the front veranda. Everything there was quiet and peaceful.

After the meal Carroll made a resurvey of the premises. Everything was as he and Sullivan had left it two days before: the blood, the smashed olive oil bottle, the blood-stained ice-pick — the faint footprints on the two back steps and for a few rods leading toward the shrubbery.

He left Carter in the Lodge and walked down the path toward Heston's cabin, deliberately avoiding the main highway. He wanted to time himself on the walk from the lodge to the cabin to test that element of Esther Devarney's story.

The path itself was beautiful; skirting the higher ground along the south bank of the placid Santee: dipping here through a copse of fern and moss—rising there to a narrow avenue through a wall of timber and passing under a canopy of green leaves and drooping gray moss.

Carroll walked slowly: hands clasped behind his back, brow furrowed meditatively. The events, as he knew them, unfolded themselves.

The stillness of early afternoon was pierced by the crack of a rifle. Almost at the same instant there was a vicious crack in the trunk of the tree Carroll was passing! A quick glance showed the hole left by the bullet—it had missed him by scarcely an inch.

He acted like lightning. In a bound he was behind the tree, crouching—muscles tensed. Some one firing at him.

Another shot cracked through the stillness! Another bullet *flimp'd* into the tree trunk!

Carroll peered cautiously from his shelter. About fifty yards away he saw a figure in the undergrowth. Slowly he drew his automatic from its holster under his left armpit.

CHAPTER XVI.

HESTON'S FRIEND.

AND then, as the figure of the almost-assassin detached itself from the concealing background of undergrowth and stepped frankly into the open—Carroll laughed.

For the figure was that of a boy, a tow-headed, freckled youngster, sans shoes, and stockings and carrying a .22-caliber pump rifle in the crook of his left arm in approved Daniel Boone fashion. He regarded Carroll part with astonishment and part with resentment.

"By Gosh!" he exploded suddenly. "I almost got him."

"Did you?" inquired the detective politely.

"Yeh— And," accusingly, "I would of, too, ef you hadn't of frightened him off."

"And because I frightened *him*—whoever he may be—you tried to pot me instead?"

"Who tried to shoot you?"

"You did."

"Didn't nuther."

"I assure you, Mr. Daniel Boone, that you came within an inch of succeeding whether you meant to or not."

"Wasn't shootin' at you," insisted the boy stubbornly. "Never even seen you."

"What were you shooting at?"

"Flyin' squirrel."

"And where was this squirrel?"

"In thet thar tree." The boy indicated the lower branches of a near-by oak. Carroll with difficulty repressed a smile.

"I'd advise you to get another rifle, my boy. To express it mildly, your bullets went wild. They hit in this tree trunk within an inch of my head. I was in a good deal more danger than your flying squirrel: not that I'm saying a word against your marksmanship. It is undoubtedly the fault of the rifle—"

"'Tain't, nuther. Mr. Heston gimme this rifle an' it come from N' Yawk."

Carroll hoped that the keen-eyed lad did not notice the start of surprise he had caused by the casual mention of the name of the man who interested Carroll more at that particular moment than any other individual. He bravely took the rifle from the boy and inspected it.

"A fine weapon," he commended gravely. "Your Mr. Heston has a good eye for rifles. Here's the trouble," and he deftly realigned the rear sight—an adjustable affair which had been jarred from position. The boy flushed slightly and then looked gratefully at Carroll.

"Say, mister, you're a regalar feller—just like Mr. Heston," he hastened to add loyally, as though by the comparison he was conferring upon his newfound friend the ultimate compliment.

"Thank you, son. And now, since we're friends, and I'm all here, might I ask your name."

"Sure. Porter Devarney. What's yourn?"

Porter Devarney! Carroll glanced sharply at the boy—but then he remembered what Farnam had told him: that Devarneys abounded through Santee Swamp. It surely couldn't be—and yet the boy's friendship with Heston.

"Mine's David—David Carroll."

The lad's eyes popped wide. "No? Say, you ain't th' real deteckative I hearn marm an' pops talkin' about, are you?"

"I suppose I am."

"Oh! golly! Sa-a-ay— Ain't it bully meetin' you?"

"Your name," said Carroll tentatively: "It's a very pretty name."

"Huh! They was so many fust names used on us Devarneys that they sorter run out, so when I come along they named me Porter, after a military academy in Charleston, where pops says I'm goin' to go next year."

"Is Seth Devarney your father?"

"Yep."

"Fine fellow. How are all your folks?"

"They ain't none but me an' marm an' pops an' sis, an' we're all well 'ceptin' sis, an' she ain't eatin' nothin' in the last couple of days."

"I'm sorry to hear that. What seems to be troubling her?"

"Most everything, I guess, though she says it ain't nothin' but headache. Marm says she's takin' on over Mr. Heston gettin' arrested— Say!" he broke off suddenly and rose to his feet, glaring belligerently at Carroll. "You ain't the feller that arrested Mr. Heston, is you?"

Carroll skirted the truth for diplomatic reasons. "No—Sheriff Potter did that."

The lad subsided. "That's good, because you an' me couldn't be friends if you had arrested him."

"You don't think he's guilty?"

"Him? Huh! He wouldn't unhook a fish he's that soft hearted. Say, he's a friend of mine, an' I know he didn't do it. Besides, wasn't I with him that afternoon?"

For the second time the lad had thrown a distinct shock into the detective. A boy of whose existence he had not known until a few minutes previous had here casually

made the most vital statement regarding the case which had yet come to his ears.

"You were with Heston, when?"

"The afternoon that lady got killed over to th' lodge."

"What were you doing?"

"Fishin'."

"What time?"

"Oh!" The boy ostentatiously produced a dollar watch and glanced reflectively at the dial. "Seems like I reckon 'twas up to about half past five I was with him—or tharabouts."

Half past five! If that were true, Heston could just about have walked to Furness Lodge, killed Mary and returned in time to meet Esther Devarney at his cabin provided that her story was to be believed in its entirety.

"Half past five, eh?" echoed Carroll casually. "And where did he go when you left?"

"Down to th' landin'."

"For what?"

"Said he was goin' out on the river in his batteau-boat."

"He has a boat?"

"Yes—just a rotten lil ol' batteau that rows like a scow. Ain't no good for nothin' but fishin' with, it's that slow."

"Did you see him start out on the river?"

"No, he sent me off."

"Where'd he send you?"

"To see sis an' tell her he wanted to see her."

"Where?"

"At his place: where y' s'pose?"

Carroll laughed. "I'm right silly: there, of course. Did you find her?"

"Sure. She was walkin' up the road t'ward his place."

"What did you tell her?"

"I just said he wanted to see her."

"You didn't say where?"

"Why no. I reckoned she knowed he wasn't at the Lodge no more."

"Then you didn't tell her that he wasn't there?"

"No. I reckoned she knowed that."

Carroll's mind was working rapidly. If the boy's story was true the chances that Heston was at the Lodge at the time of the murder were reduced to a minimum, but he was establishing the truth of his sister's story and substantiating her statement that she was at Furness Lodge and alone at the time the murder was committed.

"What did you do after you left her, Porter?"

"Sort of went into the woods. I wanted to see could I kill some sparrers with my rifle."

"You didn't see anybody else before you got home?"

"No buddy but Sandy Hawkins in his ox-cart an' Mart Farnam."

"Where were they going?"

"Sandy was goin' home, I guess; an' Mart was headed t'ward the Karnack d'rection. Most likely he was a goin' f'r some licker. He's a pow'ful heavy drinker, is Mart."

"Do you like him?"

"Mart?" The boy shrugged. "I guess he's all right. I like him better 'n sis does, but that ain't sayin' so much."

"You prefer Heston, eh?"

The youthful eyes glistened. "Say, Mr. Carroll, that's a fine man f'r you. Gee! I hope sis marries him. So does she," he added naïvely.

"And after you passed Farnam and Hawkins," pursued Carroll, "did you see any one else?"

"Not tell I got to the village, an' then I seen all the folks. Say, what you askin' me all these questions for?"

"Just interest. They've got my best friend accused of this crime, Porter, and I'm doing what I can to free him."

"You got a pow'ful hard job," said the boy honestly. "Ev'ybody says he done it."

"I think everybody is wrong."

Porter sighed. "Well, I guess you ought to know, seein' as you're a regalar deteckative. But if he didn't do it, *who* done it?"

"That's a poser, son. I'm not sure yet."

Again the flash of antagonism in the boy's eyes. "You ain't tryin' to prove nothin' on Mr. Heston, are you?"

"Nothing against him, son. I'm just trying to find out who really did it. Say—how'd you like to walk over to the Lodge with me and ride home in my automobile?"

"Golly! Would I—"

They were fast friends by the time they reached the Lodge, and the boy luxuriated in the deep-cushioned upholstery during the short drive to the village. He took Carroll proudly in tow, and, rifle over his shoulder, led the way to his crude home.

CHAPTER XVII.

ESTHER OR FORREST.

THROUGH the window of the western-most room Carroll could see the thin, angular figure of Mrs. Devarney bending patiently over the battered and recalcitrant kitchen range. A wisp of smoke issued from the mud-caked chimney. Seth Devarney, huge of frame, sat hunched on his door-step, dry-smoking a corncob pipe. He rose as his son and the detective approached, nodded his greeting and delved into the subject nearest his heart without circumlocution.

"Glad to see ye, Mr. Carroll. My darter, Essie, has only jes' come back from Karnack an' she's pow'ful mad they wouldn't let her see Heston. She sorter lays it to you, too."

The girl appeared in the doorway as he finished speaking. Her eyes were red—it was plain that she had been weeping; but her manner was militant. There was no sign of weakening before the detective and she carried the battle to him with a positiveness of speech he admired in spite of himself.

"By what right have you forbidden company to Mr. Heston?" she asked.

He bowed slightly. "I haven't done that, Miss Esther. I have no such power."

"Let's don't quibble!" she flashed. "I realize that Sheriff Potter gave the order; but it was you who manufactured it."

"You are sure?"

"Certainly. Things are not done that way in Karnack County, and never have been. A man accused of every crime on the calendar has heretofore been allowed to hold receptions if he cared to. Besides, the thing is illegal and you know it."

"I don't think it's illegal, Miss Esther. He has the privilege of seeing a lawyer if he cares to. Aside from that I believe the matter is one within the discretionary powers of the sheriff."

"You will certainly admit that it is unjust, won't you?"

"Yes."

"You will admit that you fostered the idea because you are bending every effort to clear Mr. Forrest, no matter what suffering and injustice are caused elsewhere?"

"Not quite so bad as that."

"You may not think so, Mr. Carroll: I'll give you the benefit of the doubt and admit that you do not—but that is precisely what you are doing. Mind you, I don't say that Mr. Forrest is guilty; but I do assert that Mr. Heston is not."

"You are sure?"

"Positive. He was at the cabin when I reached there and I went direct from the Lodge. The murder was committed after I left and he couldn't have done that and beaten me to the cabin."

"There is only one way he could have done it," said Carroll ruminatively. "He might have come to the Lodge in his boat and returned the same way."

The girl laughed shortly. "Some one has been misleading you. He could walk backward quicker than that boat can travel. It's a leaky, barnacled scow."

"Well—" Carroll shrugged, "*somebody* committed the crime."

"It was not Mr. Heston."

"And *I* am equally as convinced that it was not Stanford Forrest."

"Well?"

"There was no one else there—"

"Except their chauffeur," she flashed.

"Except Carter," he murmured, half to himself. "Yes, you're right, Miss Esther—Carter could have done it. That is it was physically possible."

"But of course you won't try to fasten the guilt on this man Carter because he was employed by your friend—"

"Please, Miss Esther—let's don't paint me in such black color. I'm not that bad—really, I'm not."

"You wouldn't let me see him. Mr. Heston, I mean."

"He can see his lawyer—or some member of his family."

She looked at him peculiarly: "Some member of his family?"

"Certainly."

"Would you classify a—a—fiancée as—family."

She stood before the detective, regal in her pride and faith.

"You mean—"

"That I have pledged myself to marry Conrad Heston, and if he will have me I will marry him to-morrow."

Seth Devarney put out a restraining hand. There was a catch in his voice: "Darter — Essie, gal: be keerful. It's pow'ful easy to git married, ye know; an' ye've got a pow'ful long time to be sorry for it arterward."

"I know, father. I understand that. But you wouldn't have your own daughter desert the man she loves because he happened to be unjustly under arrest: you wouldn't have me do a thing like that, would you?"

"'Tain't fair to frame the question thataway, Essie; 'tain't fair — thet's what. Bein' it's you I don't wanter tell the truth—"

She touched his shoulder lightly and turned triumphantly to Carroll. "You see the stuff we're made of, Mr. Carroll!"

He inclined his head. "You win, Miss Esther. I shall see to it that from to-morrow morning on you are allowed to see Heston. Let me compliment you on your loyalty—and advise you disinterestedly that you wait for the marriage until you are quite sure that there is nothing—this affair—or something in his past life, to crop up between you."

"I'm not afraid," she answered proudly. "As for this affair, I know he is innocent. You see, I was at the Lodge and I *know!*"

And that night, as Carroll smoked numberless cigarettes on the veranda of Furness Lodge, just one idea remained in his brain: one spectral certainty of which he could not rid himself.

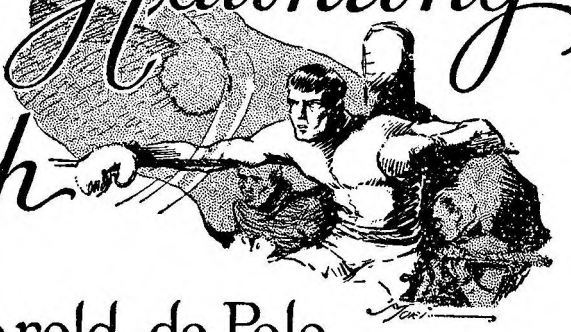
Esther Devarney had been at the Lodge immediately before the murder! Her admission cleared Carter automatically. And thus far Esther Devarney was the only person known to have been on the scene at about that hour!

Esther Devarney had been there—yes; Esther—and Stanford Forrest.

Carroll spent a sleepless night.

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.

The Haunting Wallop



by Harold de Polo

BEFORE he was fifteen, Brickie Nolan had indisputably licked every contender the block or the neighborhood boasted—and he had blithely gone out of his age and weight to do it. After that, he had apparently been content to rest upon his laurels—or forced to, some said. Anyway, there wasn't a noticeable amount of opposition, and he seemed perfectly happy driving the grocery cart for Hinkle, the

genial Dutchman on the corner. He did it for over two years, and he probably would have been doing it yet if—

Sure; you win. The female of the species;— What?— Oh, no; you've got me wrong!— Say; if *they're* not the little things worth battling for—what *is? I* never got in a mix-up that wasn't staged by one, God bless 'em!—

Maybe Brickie was't feeling just benign that morning, for it was the third delivery. At least, his jaw was sticking out and he was eying the multitude suspiciously, sort of hoping someone would crack that old one about why not use his horse to hang hats on.

And then, as he perilously turned a corner, he lamped a scene that sent the red liquid bounding hotly to his head. Mary Costello, the dame that slung sodas over at Halloran's place, had suddenly found her progress impeded—and it was impeded by two of the big guys of the block as they stepped from their leering on the corner and endeavored each to take an arm!

Brickie didn't see much—but he *did* see that the girl turned like an enraged animal, her gray eyes glinting. He didn't get the chance to notice further particulars. He dropped the reins, put one foot on his nag's rump, and landed with his two on the sidewalk. Whereupon followed action:

" You *will—willyu?"*

Emitting this time-honored phrase with the correct snarl, the youthful Mr. Nolan wisely and immediately got busy with his pair of well-worn mitts.

Mary was treated to a swift and bloody combat—and right from a ringside seat, at that. Brickie fought without science, without coolness; he just waded in and hacked with his arms and took all they had to give him. For the first few moments he certainly didn't have much accepting to do; he was too busy handing it out, with his teeth clenched and his narrowed eyes blazing.

After a little of this, though, his older and far huskier opponents began to regain the well-known poise of mind. Once accomplished, they apparently decided to bring strategy into play, one attacking and gaining his attention while the other flashed in from behind. Indeed, for a brief instant Brickie went groggy—so groggy that Mary let out a hurt gasp as he stumbled forward. But he didn't fall—and he likewise and luckily didn't get the uppercut.

Instead, like many a man before him all along through the ages, the youngster grabbed new courage—or second wind, perhaps—from the voice of she whom he was defending. Anyway, Brickie reeled back, rubbed his forearm across his eyes, and once more delivered himself of his one and only fighting phrase:

" You *will—willyu?"*

It shortly seemed as if they absolutely wouldn't. Brickie Nolan, stripped, caused about a-hundred-and-thirty-pounds disturbance to the scales, and he reared himself into the ozone for no more than some five feet and seven-and-one-half inches—but every ounce of him, and every bone of him, and every nerve of him, suddenly became like some cyclonic mad thing.

He simply tore right in, his arms flailing and his fists landing—landing, landing. Their defense was futile; and forthwith they abandoned it in order to essay his own tactics. This was their second mistake; they should have run—ignominiously. To be precise, in exactly ninety seconds they did that little deed.

One of them, however, had to slowly crawl around the corner, on hands and knees, before being able to execute the pace. And Brickie, standing alone, wiped the blood from a harmlessly cut lip and turned and grinned happily at Mary!

" Gee," gasped Mary, her face shining— *"Gee,* but I never knew you could scrap like *that!"*

Like various other champions, Brickie wilted under the admiring gaze of the charmer:

" Aw—aw, say," he grinned sheepishly, averting his head as he reddened—" that ain't nothin'!"

But that evening, as he sauntered home with Mary after having consumed some eight banana-splits, he was assured and convinced that his work of the morning *had* been something—and something very big, indeed.

She knew the fight game, did Mary, she

insisted. Wasn't her brother a ring scrapper—or *hadn't* he been? Sure, Battling Costello, that was the boy. Yes, he'd been good—once. Before he'd been put to sleep—and on a foul, too—by that new lightweight contender, Benny Siegel. A low frame-up, that was what it was, and he'd never been any good since. No, he was out of it now, working over in the shipyards. Sure!

What? Oh, yes—that was why she was telling him, just to prove she *knew*. And if she *did* know, there was one thing she'd *bet* one—and that was that he, Brickie, had the makings of a champ—a *champ*. She could tell, all right. Just let him keep at it and get down to the regular training; he'd clean them *all* up, in the end; he'd—he'd even be able to stop that tricky Benny Siegel who was certainly going to get the title. Wouldn't she like to see *that*—wouldn't—

Young Mr. Nolan, being only human, expanded under the spell of it. Yep, he usta be good as a kid; say, hadn't he cleaned up the neighborhood—and hadn't he tackled the big birds? Ye—ah. He'd *thought* of goin' in the ring, years ago. Aw, he didn't know why he hadn't. He—he kinda didn't think girls and most people liked it. Sorta—sorta a *un*respect'ble business. He was goin' to night school, now, three times a week; he—

Unrespectable? Not a decent business? It just made her tired, it did, to hear that kind of talk. Why, what was wrong with it? Didn't the swellest people make friends with you? Didn't you earn your money honestly? Wasn't it a fair thing?

She didn't see any of that brutal part they talked about; *she* thought it was a *man's* work— And Brickie was good—yessir, he was *good*. He'd wear the lightweight belt yet, if he took it sensibly and trained; she'd *bet* he would!

Brickie, that night, did a lot of thinking instead of sleeping. Why, I don't know—because his mind was certainly made up before he left her on the stoop. If he still was wondering the next morning, he soon found all excuses swept aside:

"You're Brickie Nolan, hey, kid?" he was asked.

He looked across the counter at a stocky, slit-eyed man with a horse-shoe pin—looked at him squarely, as he looked at everyone:

"Uh-huh!"

"Well, kid," said the other, flicking his ashes. "I'm Kerry—Mike Kerry. Maybe you're worth a tryout—a pal saw you work yest'day morning. Blow around the club about eight—see?"

"I'm there," responded young Mr. Nolan briefly, with his now-famous flash of a grin.

He was—both ways. It was the latter that counted. After fifteen minutes of merry amusement, the fourth-rate pug who was putting him through the paces held up his hands and asked Kerry to be allowed to breathe:

"Mike," he said, "the kid ain't no misfit, I'll tell the worl'. He's as green as a noo case note, but he's got a wallop like a mule. An' say, he kin take his dose. Honest, Mike, I slips him some beauts, an' he don't phaze. The guy's a comer!"

Kerry, the wily promoter and manager and one-time battler, who'd been in the game over thirty years, seemed to agree. At least, he shifted his cigar and went to the trouble of slapping Brickie on an exquisitely muscled shoulder:

"Come around to-morrow night, kid—same time?"

"Say," retorted Brickie, showing his teeth. John L. couldn't keep me away!"

Being out of his class, the old battler wouldn't have displayed any interest, anyway; however, could a certain lightweight aspirant have seen him, those first two evenings, there is no doubt that he might have done a little worrying. Brickie's improvement, under a wiser teacher, was decidedly marked. In fact, when the scrimmage was over Mike Kerry was seen to nod and chew his weed, as he listened, in that manner that betokened satisfaction:

"Yep; the kid's there. Mike, he got the guts of a tiger an' he packs a punch like a sledge-hammer. All he needs is to keep his bean—keep his bean. In a year or two—"

And Brickie, during the next few months, proved that he was certainly a glutton for learning. He was always on time; he was

always willing! and, as everyone noticed, he was always wearing that grin when in action. A good boy—a good boy!

However, the youthful Nolan had one fault. We all have; and we all have, more or less, heaps of 'em. Yet the embryo pugilist, in the possession of his particular one, was carrying an exceedingly dangerous burden. It happened to be blind courage —with the italics and the accent on the *blind!*

For a time—for about two rounds, in fact—he took it easily and sparred. And he sparred, you could believe Kerry, like a ten-year veteran. After that, however, Brickie couldn't stand the strain any longer. He just had to narrow his eyes and tighten his teeth and wade right in.

He took everything that everyone had to give him—and he sure was an exponent of reciprocity. They argued with him; they railed at him; they threatened him—but the most they could do was to get Brickie to behave for a round or two!

At last, after a few months, the first big moment came. He was matched to meet Young Burns (Izzie Einstein) in a four-round preliminary mix-up over in Jersey. To Brickie, of course, it was the event of the evening—the event of his life. In fact, it was rather of an event to one Mike Kerry, which same is remarking something!

Brickie went into the rumpus with two ideas in his head. The first was that he already had the other bird knocked cold; the second was that he must remember Mary's advice—not to mention Kerry's—warning him to keep cool. Regarding the first, I'll state instanter that he was correct; when it comes to the second, it was the same old story.

In the maiden round, he walked circles about Young Burns and handled his dukes in a way that caused Mike to grunt in glee; but, as he stepped up again, he must have grown panicky from thinking that there were only three rounds left. He couldn't take no chances, he couldn't, no matter *what* Mary had said. And so he just went right in for slaughter.

He took two stiff uppercuts, three messy body punches, and another over the ear. But that was all. He landed with his right—and the back of his antagonist's cranium landed on the resin. It wasn't necessary for the referee to count ten seconds —he could have counted ten hundred!

Going home with Kerry, however, he did not receive the praise he expected:

"You're good, kid—you're good an' you're game. But—" with an ominous shake and a hitching of the cigar—"lay offa that rushin' in stuff!"

"Aw, gee," smiled young Mr. Nolan, "*he* was a *cinch!*"

"Sure he was," agreed his manager, "but you ain't meetin' that kind *all* your days. Remember that, kid—an' show up tomorrow night an' I'll have Wolcott give you the double-o!"

And Mary's verdict, too, was just the same. Wide-eyed, her lithe young body tingling, she listened to his version of the encounter. When he had finished, she told him how glad she was and how she'd always told him he could—but she also shook her head:

"I do wish, though, Brickie, that you'd be more careful—that you'd keep your head and do more sparring! Oh, yes; I know —I know you can take medicine. But so could my brother Frank—and look where *he* is after getting' a lickin' from that Benny Siegel! Please, Brickie—won't you?"

Of course, Brickie promised—and when he was promising he meant it, you can lay odds on that. Huh, who wouldn't mean it when they looked into Mary Costello's gray eyes?

To the best of his ability, he kept his word. That is, it took him exactly three rounds, in his next preliminary, before he knocked out his victim—but he'd done the blind rushing stunt in the end.

"Improvin', kid—improvin'," commented Kerry, who knew how to handle humans. "Easy on the rough business, though!"

"Oh, Brickie," was Mary's more fervent pleading, "I know you won—I know he wasn't your class—but *please* be more careful!"

"Quit worryin', Mary," was his laughing answer. "I guess I can't lick these babies, eh?"

"That's what Frank always said—and

that's just *why* he got his. And you don't want that to happen. Just think, Brickie, Benny Siegel will win his fight next week —sure—and how would *you* feel if you got knocked out of the game before you got your chance? *Please,* Brickie!"

More promises; and this time, so Kerry noticed in his training bouts, he seemed to have taken the advice to heart. Possibly, in a measure, this was due to Benny Siegel having captured the coveted title.

Young Mr. Nolan had seen that fight—had watched it like a hawk. He had noticed the lightning-like defense of the winner, the cool, calculating plan of campaign that allowed nothing to get his goat. Indeed, though he was a dirty fighter who used even dirtier language, the youngster was aware that he was a shrewd and canny ring-general!

Anyway, at his next appearance—a six-round affair—he waited until thirty seconds before the final gong. Then he let loose, took a few himself, and ended up by sending in the sleep-producer!

"More like it, Brickie," said Mike, patting him not once, but twice. "Keep up *that* work and we'll cop the bacon!"

Brickie Nolan kept it up, all right—also alas. In fact, he kept it up so consistently, so absolutely, that Mike Kerry and Mary Costello and a host of admirers often implored him to bring back some of the old-time pep. And this, briefly, is the why and wherefore of it!

Benny Siegel, after a rest-up from the championship battle, did the not strange thing of turning to vaudeville. He sparred around a bit with a well-trained partner—and then he stepped out and issued a challenge to the house. A hundred dollars reward to anyone who outpointed him in three rounds—a thousand if they knocked him out. It was good stuff, as many have found—and just as easy and harmless!

Brickie, without telling Mary or Kerry a word, hied himself up to the first balcony. Before Siegel's manager had finished the challenge, he was down in the orchestra and walking up the aisle. On the stage, he was "examined" by the champ's partner, gave a false name, and stepped in and shook hands.

Benny was careless, going through the business with a bored and sneering smile—but it didn't take long for his aspect to change. Brickie was showing something —he was showing so much that the whole house was shrieking. Also, when he went to his corner in that first round, he was telling himself that this bird certainly wasn't what he'd been cracked up to be.

Brickie, don't forget, wasn't but a little over eighteen, and when the second started he went back to his old tactics. He'd clean this guy—and he'd clean him quick and right!

Frankly, he doesn't remember much after making that decision. He feels sure that he landed a couple, and he feels quite as sure that he made the champ reel; but then, as he made one last rush to inflict the final damage, he *thinks* that Benny feinted and—and—

The jaw was where the explosion connected—and it took two physicians precisely forty-seven minutes to bring him to!

It was three months before young Mr. Nolan again entered the ring. When he did, it was for a ten-rounder against the most formidable opponent he had yet faced —a fair second-rater.

This time there was no knockout. Brickie, exhibiting a truly phenomenal defense, lightning-like footwork, dexterous handling of the gloves, was overwhelmingly given the decision on points. Indeed, the morning sport pages—and some for two mornings running—came out and scorned beating around the bush. Brickie Nolan, they brazenly stated, was as pretty a piece of lightweight timber as had ever loomed up on the fistic horizon. All this, in fact, and much, very much more. (And it wasn't all done just for space rates, either.)

But the next day, over the lunch table, there was a conference between Mike Kerry, McGowan, his lieutenant, and young Mr. Nolan.

The manager was more serious than Brickie had even seen him. He allowed his coffee to go cold, and his cigar to go out, and he sat and studied his protégé:

"Brickie," he said, his every word crisp, "You had that guy so far out-classed last night that I swear I feel mean about takin'

the money. But that ain't the point—an' *you* know it as well *I* know it. Kid, you didn't have the ole pep—you didn't pack the big wallop. Say, you'd oughta put that bum away in the first three or four rounds. Whatsamatter?"

"Huh," returned Brickie—but he had to flush—"didn't I *win?*"

"Yeah. An' if you *hadn't,* son, I'd 'a' given you the gate without no anaesthetic! No, Brickie, that ain't the point. You was too cagey, too afraid of that delicate chin, too worried about your lovely body caressin' the floor.

"That's the ticket, kid, an' I know it. Your defense sure was perfect, that I'm admittin'—but it certainly played hallaluyah an' hell with your punches! Say, you ain't—you ain't *yaller?*"

"The guy that says I *am,*" flashed Brickie, half-rising, "is gonna get a free ride—in a' amb'lance!"

"That's what *we* think, too," put in McGowan quietly. "But, listen: Here we been tryin' to hold you back—an' now we gotta work to make you wade in— Brickie, how's the jaw!"

Young Mr. Nolan flushed. For a fraction of a second, he closed his eyes—and when he opened them it was to thrust out his chin and glare at the two men opposite:

"I'll tell yu *one* thing," he informed them tensely. "There ain't no *other* guy ever gonna land on it!"

Upon hearing which, Mike Kerry flashed a shrewd glance at his aide, ordered another demitasse, and completely changed the subject by yawningly commenting that it was a lovely day to go up and see the Giants cop!

Brickie, after that, was put through the stiffest training any prize-fighter had ever known. Kerry sent the best in against him and they had one order and one order only. Get to his jaw with all they had.

It was a simple command to give—but it was a well-nigh impossible one to execute. Young Nolan developed a defensive skill that was weird—and it was chiefly centered about the lower part of his face. It is affirmed—and verified—that not one of his training partners, even once, managed to strike the vulnerable spot!

In fact, it wasn't exactly easy to connect with *any* part of him, as far as that goes. He was puzzling lightning, as McGowan expressed it—and one and all agreed that he was one of the neatest parriers in the game. However, the old dash—the old power behind his blows—was gone. His manager raved, Mary did even more so, his friends did—but Brickie had one reply to them all:

"There ain't no *other* guy ever gonna land on it!"

For a year he worked—and worked hard. He mixed up in precisely sixteen battles—and he won them. It is significant that only four were accomplished by the K. O. route; in the other dozen, he had so far outclassed his men that the affairs had verged on the pitiful.

The press, now, were unanimously for him. He was the greatest kid who'd ever donned the gloves, he was—and all the rest of it. Of course, he needed experience; given that, and a punch such as he had displayed in his first few scraps, he would be a combination of Joe Gans and Battling Nelson put together.

The columns about him grew longer. What was it, anyway? He didn't seem yellow—far from it. You could tell that by the cool way he handled himself, and by that impudent grin that was always on his face. As it was, they admitted he was a match for Benny Siegel; they doubted, however, if he packed a punch that would send the champ to sleep!

"Oh, Brickie, what *is* the matter," begged Mary, literally with tears in her eyes. "I know I used to tell you to be careful—but I didn't mean it this way!"

"Mary," he told her, eying her solemnly! "I just can't help it, that's all. I—I'll tell you. My jaw ain't good, see? I ain't tellin' no one, but I'm tellin' you. Mary, if I ever git one there again—one *real* one —I'm done. I—I know it. I keep thinkin' of it all the time!"

"Brickie Nolan," she answered him, "you're just crazy. You got as strong a jaw as any of them, an' you know it. It's that you're thinkin' of that lucky crack Benny Siegel gave you. Why, Brickie, you was only a kid then—you didn't know any-

thing about the game. Oh, Brickie, don't keep on thinkin' of that!"

"I ain't," rumbled Brickie, blinking his eyes. "I got a bum jaw, I'm tellin' you, Mary. An'—an', anyway, ain't I gettin' away with it!"

Which was always young Mr. Nolan's last and indisputable argument!

After a few more fights—fights in which he showed still further evidence of his wonderful defense—the press began to ask why it was that a match with Benny Siegel hadn't been proposed. It was the first time a pugilist—or his manager—had evaded a like issue. What was wrong, anyway? The public had a right to know, that was what!

Mike Kerry, being an artist, said many a column-full without in the slightest uttering any real news. Suddenly, from his hazy speech, he broke out into straight-from-the-shoulder language. He not only wanted a match; he demanded it. Didn't he have the finest boy in the world—and wasn't it *due* the public? Huh, he always knew that Siegel fake was a yellow cur!

But there was valid reason for Mike Kerry's startling switch in viewpoint—and here it is:

Brickie, the night before, had stepped in against Ernie Brothers, the former champ. He was still good, was Ernie; indeed, people had begun to say that he was coming back as strong as ever and deserved another crack at the title.

The arena was crammed, for here were the two logical contenders. Brickie, for the first few rounds, fought the usual fight—a lightning-like, impassable defense, interspersed with choppy, jolting jabs that shook—but that didn't shake quite enough.

In the fourth, however, he must have been dozing; at least, that is his own explanation. Be that as it may, Brothers slipped one under his guard—and all that he had in him came squarely in contact with young Nolan's jaw. Brickie hadn't believed it. The blow had stung—stung and dazed him—but it had not ended him. Rage took possession of him—rage to think that this old-timer should get by him and hit him in the spot he had so proudly held sacred.

There was only one thing to do—and that was to slaughter Ernie. Therefore, for the first time in over a year, he tightened his jaws, narrowed his eyes, and waded in as of yore. It is kind, for Ernie Brothers's sake, to make it brief. Suffice it to say that before the gong was ready to sound the one-time champ was counted out after having met an attack that not one man in a hundred thousand, so the experts said, could have withstood!

But Brickie was not as jubilant as he should have been, during those next few days, when one considered that the articles were already signed for his championship battle with Benny Siegel. He had to force himself to laugh when friends congratulated him; he had to force himself still further to agree with his manager and admirers that he would annihilate his opponent. Indeed, to get right down to it in a few words, perhaps his remark to Mary Costello will best explain it:

"Gawd—Gawd, Mary," he breathed, in a sort of whisper, "just think what woulda happened to me if it had been Benny Siegel!"

As far as Brickie Nolan was concerned, *he* was fairly sure of what would have happened had it been Benny Siegel. Oh, yes; he knew, all right, all right. He could still feel that wallop; he could still remember the blinding explosion of it; he could still actually *see* that fist coming in.

It was before him in all his fights—and it was before him whenever he allowed himself to think. He didn't believe any man in the world had such a wicked blow—and he knew that there was decidedly no man in the world who could stand it. If Benny landed again—if Benny landed again—

He went through his training for the big bout as scrupulously, as painstakingly, as obediently, as anyone could ask. True, Mike Kerry simply couldn't manage to shake his poise and cause him to carry the fighting; on the other hand, every expert agreed that, no matter what happened, the champion simply couldn't get through his guard. On the whole, and even though they deplored his lack of aggressiveness, the Nolan camp was an exceedingly cheery and optimistic one!

Indeed, the least happy of them all was

Brickie himself—though he didn't show it. As for him, he knew—*knew*—that if Siegel once connected he was gone. There was no chance, no hope, of getting by after taking one of those sledge-hammer wallops. Yes, if that happened, he was licked!

Came the night of the fight—and came Mary, from her box seat, to his dressing-room. She walked up to him, two hands out-stretched, with a clean smile on her fine lips and a clean light in her finer eyes:

"You'll win, Brickie—an' you'll win by a knockout!"

"I'll be doin' my best, Mary," he told her. "But—but, say, Mary, can't you wish a feller luck; can't you— Oh, you know, Mary. Just *one*—just the first!"

She came honestly to him and took his face in her hands—and she kissed him once, on the lips:

"By a knockout, Brickie!"

"An'—an' if I do, Mary, will you—"

"Win first," she smiled, backing to the door.

Almost fiercely, Brickie Nolan glared at her—and when he spoke his words exploded:

"So help me Gawd, Mary—I will!"

As he walked down the isle and clambered over the ropes, with Kerry and McGowan on either side of him, he felt a mad surge of fighting lust go through his body. The champion had not shown as yet, and Brickie faced over twenty thousand roaring, waving, maddened people. To—to hell with his jaw and that defensive bunk—he'd just wade in the way he used to and lick the living heart out of the dirtiest fighter in the game, that's what he'd do. And he could do it, too—*he could do it!*

But Brickie, suddenly, changed his mind. No, he didn't tell himself that he couldn't—but he did tell himself that the rushing game wasn't the dope. The cause of this was Benny Siegel—Benny, the champ, strolling slowly and arrogantly along from his own quarters with a contemptuous sneer on his face. Brickie winced—winced hard. He could already see that fist—he could already feel himself sinking!

Yet the contender retained his poise. He lolled back in his corner, arms slung over the ropes and wearing his grin, while the champion was introduced. He listened, idly, to the last instructions of Kerry and McGowan—the same thing he had listened to every day of his training:

"Don't mind his chin-music, no matter how dirty it gets. Don't lose your bean, no matter what happens. Don't forget to keep at his ribs, under the heart!"

Next, they were in the ring, they were shaking hands, and they had stepped apart. Action had started.

"Ain't he young, though, Sam," was Benny's first move, as he feinted and tried to slip a husky one over right at the start.

"Yeah," grinned Brickie, as he deftly let it slide off his shoulder—"so young I ain't learned how to fight dirty yet!"

After that, the astute Mr. Siegel attended strictly to business. His game, in the case of an opponent whose nanny couldn't be annexed, was an apparently lazy battle. Nevertheless, it was not so slow as it looked—not by any means. Then, when he found an opening, he usually let in with the sleep-producer.

But Brickie Nolan was well aware of all this, and he kept his grin and displayed some of his astounding footwork; too, he kept working for the ribs, for the ribs—under the heart. Just twice, during that first round, he managed to connect—and on the second punch he extracted a foul speech from Benny.

As for himself, when he went to his corner, he was practically untouched. He had blocked every blow, excepting three which had harmlessly and expertly been made to slide from his shoulders!

The battle, now, is ring history. For exactly six more rounds, these two perfect lightweights—the two cleverest boys ever to face one another, they claim—gave an exhibition of skill that had never or has never been equalled. To have given a decision on points, until then, would have been an utter impossibility. Benny had been trying for the jaw, but had not reached it once; Brickie had been trying for the heart, and had reached it no more than four times—but lightly.

The great crowd was raving—raving insane. Sentiment was fairly equally divided, and there was no let-up. Gradually, how-

ever, they began to cry for action—more action. Dig in and mess it up, they asked—show a little slugging.

The seconds and advisers, in the corners, had kept quiet. Here were two pieces of faultless machinery that mere man could not help. It was not a question of the cleverest; it was a question, solely, of which one would first crack under the strain!

Brickie knew this—and so, probably, did Benny. The former, however, also knew another thing. If that fist once landed on his jaw, as it had in what seemed the dim, dim past, he was gone and done for. He had to hold out, that was all—hold out and hope for gaining the decision. Perhaps in the last round he might let loose a little—perhaps, perhaps. He'd see—it depended—perhaps!

Then, at the beginning of the seventh, Benny switched to his old game. Coming out, he wore an uglier and a more tight-lipped sneer than ever. He was speaking through his nose, just loud enough for his opponent to hear—and the speech that came forth would have nauseated the hardiest reprobate. But Brickie, of course, was expecting it—and it passed him by without even causing the slightest ruffle. It anything, he quickened the pace—and the crowd, now every man and woman of them eager for something, begged him to send in the sleep-producer!

Benny, still mouthing vile words, must have realized that it wasn't more than twenty or thirty seconds until the bell. Anyway, apparently he deemed the psychological moment had arrived for his most telling taunt. It cannot be reprinted. Briefly, it had to do with Mary!

Also, it told—told even beyond the wildest hopes of the unclean pugilist. Brickie Nolan, they say, seemed to pause for just the minutest fraction of his second, his face turning to a death-mask. Then, with a ghastly shriek that literally chilled every spine, he blindly closed his eyes and rushed forward like a mad thing let loose!

Had one of his flailing arms landed, it is asserted that Benny Siegel would have been close to death. As it was, the unsportsmanlike champion deftly evaded the wild swings, stepped in under one, and lashed out one of his famous uppercuts that started from the floor. Simultaneously, it caught Brickie Nolan directly on the tip of the jaw—and the gong sounded!

A mighty shout—a mighty intaking of breath—and then the silence that only a great, silent crowd can convey. Brickie Nolan, it is true, staggered—staggered blindly. However, although he wore a foolish, dazed look on his face, he walked evenly back to his corner!

Kerry and McGowan were trying to work over him as only seconds in a championship bout can work. Brickie, however, was trying to wave them away and absolutely refused to answer their questions or listen to their advice. He had only one thought in his mind—and one only:

"He hit me on the jaw," he kept saying. "Benny Siegel hit me on the jaw—hit me on the jaw—hit me on the jaw!"

But his brain was telling him more—much more. He knew well that he had taken everything the champion could give him—taken a far more powerful blow than he had that other time, back on the vaudeville stage. Yep; he had taken the blow he had feared for years—the blow that had caused him to utterly change his style of scrapping—the blow that he had thought would mean his end. He had taken it and was still standing.

Why, coming right down to it, it hadn't even been as hard as that one Ernie Brothers had given him—no he'd be hanged if it had— He—he could hardly believe it, that was all. It—it meant that he'd been kidding himself—just kidding himself like a young fool. Why—why—this Benny Siegel bird wasn't even a second-rater—he was just a dub— And here he'd been kidding himself—

But again he was called to the ring. He didn't hear a word Kerry or McGowan said—he had his eyes glued on Benny Siegel, sauntering slowly out with that ugly, nasty leer on his lips. Then, suddenly, he acted.

They say that he didn't even touch the floor. Besides that, they can't give you anything very definite. Another thing they add. As he cleaved through the air, they heard him yell his now-famous battle-cry:

" You will—willyu?"

For the following two minutes, the pandemonium that reigned has often been told—likewise the battle. Every sport writer in the country has outdone himself; even the old-timers, who saw Battling Nelson lose his title to Ad Wolgast, admit that the hundred and twenty seconds they witnessed were the swiftest and gamiest they had ever seen.

Brickie Nolan waded in with closed eyes. Benny Siegel, they tell, fought perhaps the wickedest fight ever known. He just stood there and slashed and slashed at that awkward, unseeing body—and he slashed without thought of fairness.

In those two minutes, no man ever took such a beating as Brickie and stood up to it. But not one blow stopped him—not one blow made him hesitate. Grimly, doggedly, almost fatalistically, he kept on going in, going in, slowly but steadily driving his enemy to the ropes. At last he did—and at last he opened his eyes!

For an instant, it seemed as if he paused. Without even trying to put up the mildest defense, he set himself for the blow. As he did, they say that Benny, with an hysterical cry that must have meant he knew he was whipped, sent both fists in rapid succession to the jaw. He might as well have battered at a steel rail. He must have realized it, too—for he cowered back and down for the first time in his life!

Then it was that Brickie let loose. Squarely, it caught the champion in the ribs—under the heart—and he went limp and sagged to the floor!

Brickie Nolan, as his hand was held aloft to proclaim him the title-holder to that screeching mob, had exactly *two* thoughts, this time, in his head:

" An' I was afraid of that dub hittin' me on the jaw—I was afraid of *him* hittin' *me* on the jaw!"

But it was the second thought that counted—and it was the second thought to which he gave voice. Pulling away from Kerry and McGowan, he turned to the box where Mary was standing:

" I did it, Mary," he yelled, " I did it, didn't I? How about it, Mary, dear? I did it, didn't I—*I did it!*"

Of course she couldn't hear him—and of course he couldn't hear her. But he could see her face—and she could see his!

THE MASK

BY JOSEPH BERNARD RETHY

YOU said that I am always gay,
That Joy abides within mine eyes;
You said that smiles forever play
Upon my lips like butterflies.
And when I laughed at some upstart,
You said I never had a heart.

You said that Happiness and I
Were brothers walking hand in hand,
That I could watch another die,
Then go rejoicing through the land.
And when I touched the Golden Bowl
You said I never had a soul.

And yet—if once you really saw
The desert wastes wherein I dwell—
Your face would blanch; you'd stand in awe
At things unseen in Dante's hell.
If once you saw me thus apart
Your tears would flow across my heart.

Trailin'

by Max Brand

Author of "The Untamed," "Children of Night," "Above the Law," etc.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SHOW.

JANSEN, the big Swede, was the first to finish his meal in Drew's dining-room. For that matter, he was always first. He ate with astonishing expedition, lowering his head till that tremendous, shapeless mouth was close to the plate and then working knife and fork alternately with an unfaltering industry. To-night, spurred on by a desire to pass through this mechanical effort and be prepared for the coming action, his speed was something truly marvelous. He did not appear to eat; the food simply vanished from the plate; it was absorbed like a mist before the wind. While the others were barely growing settled in their places, Jansen was already through.

He wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, produced Durham and papers, and proceeded to light up. Lawlor, struggling still to reestablish himself in the eyes of Bard as the real William Drew, seized the opportunity to exert a show of authority. He smashed his big fist on the table.

"Jansen!" he roared.

"Eh?" grunted the Swede.

"Where was you raised?"

"Me?"

"You, square-head."

"Elvaruheimarstadhaven."

"Are you sneezin' or talkin' English?"

Jansen, irritated, bellowed: "Elvaruheimarstadhaven! That's where I was born."

"That's where you was born? Elvaru—damn such a language! No wonder you Swedes don't know nothin'. It takes all your time learnin' how to talk your lingo. But if you ain't never had no special trainin' in manners, I'm goin' to make a late start with you now. Put out that cigarette!"

The pale eyes of Jansen stared, fascinated; the vast mouth fell agape.

"Maybe," he began, and then finished weakly: "I be damned!"

"There ain't no reasonable way of doubtin' that unless you put out that smoke. Hear me?"

Shorty Kilrain, coming from the kitchen, grinned broadly. Having felt the lash of discipline himself, he was glad to see it fall in another place. He continued his gleeful course around that side of the table.

And big Jansen slowly, imperturbably, raised the cigarette and inhaled a mighty cloud smoke which issued at once in a rushing, fine blue mist, impelled by a snort.

"Maybe," he rumbled, completing his thought, "maybe you're one damn fool!"

"I'm going to learn you who's boss in these parts," boomed Lawlor. "Put out that cigarette! Don't you know no better than to smoke at the table?"

Jansen pushed back his chair and started to rise. There was no doubt as to his intentions; they were advertised in the dull and growing red which flamed in his face. But Kilrain, as though he had known such a moment would come, caught the Swede by the shoulders and forced him back into the chair. As he did so he whispered something in the ear of Jansen.

"Let him go!" bellowed Lawlor. "Let him come on. Don't hold him. I ain't had

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for November 1.

work for my hands for five years. I need exercise, I do."

The mouth of Jansen stirred, but no words came. A hopeless yearning was in his eyes. But he dropped the cigarette and ground it under his heel.

"I thought," growled Lawlor, "that you knew your master, but don't make no mistake again. Speakin' personal, I don't think no more of knockin' down a Swede than I do of flickin' the ashes off'n a cigar."

He indulged in a side glance at Bard to see if the latter were properly impressed, but Anthony was staring blankly straight before him, unable, to all appearances, to see anything of what was happening.

"Kilrain," went on Lawlor, "trot out some cigars. You know where they're kept."

Kilrain falling to the temptation, asked: "Where's the key to the cabinet?"

For Drew kept his tobacco in a small cabinet, locked because of long experience with tobacco-loving employees. Lawlor started to speak, checked himself, fumbled through his pockets, and then roared: "Smash the door open. I misplaced the key."

No semblance of a smile altered the faces of the cow-punchers around the table, but glances of vague meaning were interchanged. Kilrain reappeared almost at once, bearing a large box of cigars under each arm.

"The eats bein' over," announced Lawlor, "we can now light up. Open them boxes, Shorty. Am I goin' to work on you the rest of my life teachin' you how to serve cigars?"

Kilrain sighed deeply, but obeyed, presenting the open boxes in turn to Bard, who thanked him, and to Lawlor, who bit off the end of his smoke and continued: "A match, Kilrain."

And he waited, swelling with pleasure, his eyes fixed upon space. Kilrain lighted a match and held it for the two in turn. Two rows of waiting, expectant eyes were turned, from the whole length of the table, toward the cigars.

"Shall I pass on the cigars?" suggested Bard.

"*These* smokes?" breathed Lawlor. "Waste 'em on common hands? Partner, you ain't serious, are you?"

A breath like the faint sighing of wind reached them; the cow-punchers were resigned, and started now to roll their Durham. But it seemed as if a chuckle came from above; it was only some sound in the gasoline lamp, a big fixture which hung suspended by a slender chain from the center of the ceiling and immediately above the table.

"Civilizin' cow-punchers," went on Lawlor, tilting back in his chair and bracing his feet against the edge of the table, "civilizin' cow-punchers is worse 'n breakin' mustangs. They's some that say it can't be done. But look at this crew. Do they look like rough uns?"

A stir had passed among the cow-punchers and solemn stares of hate transfixed Lawlor, but he went on: "I'm askin' you, do these look rough?"

"I should say," answered Bard courteously, "that you have a pretty experienced lot of cattlemen."

"Experienced? Well, they'll pass. They've had experience with bar whisky and talkin' to their cards at poker, but aside from bein' pretty much drunks and crookin' the cards, they ain't anything uncommon. But when I got 'em they was wild, they was. Why, if I'd talked like this in front of 'em they'd of been guns pulled. But look at 'em now. I ask you: Look at 'em now! Ain't they tame? They hear me call 'em what they are, but they don't even bat an eye. Yes, sir, I've tamed 'em. They took a lot of lickin', but now they're tamed. Hello!"

For through the door stalked a newcomer. He paused and cast a curious eye up the table to Lawlor. "What the hell!" he remarked naively. "Where's the chief?"

"Fired!" bellowed Lawlor without a moment of hesitation.

"Who fired him?" asked the new man, with an expectant smile, like one who waits for the point of a joke, but he caught a series of strange signals from men at the table and many a broad wink.

"I fired him, Gregory," answered Lawlor. "I fired Nash!"

He turned to Bard.

"You see," he said rather weakly, "the boys is used to callin' Nash 'the chief.'"

"Ah, yes," said Bard, "I understand."

And Lawlor felt that he *did* understand, and too well.

Gregory, in the mean time, silenced by the mysterious signs from his fellow cowpunchers, took his place and began eating without another word. No one spoke to him, but as if he caught the tenseness of the situation, his eyes finally turned and glanced up the table to Bard.

It was easy for Anthony to understand that glance. It is the sort of look which the curious turn on the man accused of a great crime and sitting in the courtroom guilty. His trial in silence had continued until he was found guilty. Apparently, he was now to be both judged and executed at the same time.

There could not be long delay. The entrance of Gregory had almost been the precipitant of action, and though it had been smoothed over to an extent, still the air was momently more charged with suspense. The men were lighting their second cigarette. With each second it grew clearer that they were waiting for something. And as if thoughtful of the work before them, they no longer talked so fluently.

Finally there was no talk at all, save for sporadic outbursts, and the blue smoke and the brown curled up slowly in undisturbed drifts toward the ceiling until a bright halo formed around the gasoline lamp. A childish thought came to Bard that where the smoke was so thick the fire could not be long delayed.

A second form appeared in the doorway, lithe, graceful, her hair almost golden.

"Ev'nin', fellers," called Sally jauntily. "Hello, Lawlor; what you doin' at the head of the table?"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE LAMP.

THE bluff was ended. It was as if the wind blew a cloud suddenly from the face of the sun and let the yellow sunlight pour brightly over the world; so every one in the room at the voice of Sally knew that the time had come for action. There no vocal answer to her, but each man rose slowly in his place, his gun naked in his hand, and every face was turned to Bard.

"Gentlemen," he said in his soft voice, "I see that my friend Lawlor has not wasted his lessons in manners. At least you know enough to rise when a lady enters the room."

His gun, held at the hip, pointed straight down the table to the burly form of Jansen, but his eyes, like those of a pugilist, seemed to be taking in every face at the table, and each man felt in some subtle manner that the danger would fall first on him. They did not answer, but hands were tightening around revolver butts.

Lawlor moved back, pace by pace, his revolver shaking in his hand.

"But," went on Bard, "you are all facing me. Is it possible?"

He laughed.

"I knew that Mr. Drew was very anxious to receive me with courtesy; I did not dream that he would be able to induce so many men to take care of me."

And Sally Fortune, bracing herself against the wall with one hand, and in the capable grasp of the other a six-gun balanced, stared in growing amazement on the scene, and shuddered at the silences.

"Bard," she called, "what have I done?"

"You've started a game," he answered, "which I presume we've all been waiting to play. What about it, boys? I hope you're well paid; I'd hate to die a cheap death."

A voice, deep and ringing, sounded close at hand, almost within the room, and from a direction which Bard could not locate.

"Don't harm him if you can help it. But keep him in that room!"

Bard stepped back a pace till his shoulders touched the wall.

"Sirs," he said, "if you keep me here in this room you will most certainly have to harm me."

A figure ran around the edge of the crowd and stood beside him.

"Stand clear of me, Sally," he muttered, much moved. "Stand away. This is a man's work."

"The work of a pack of coyotes!" she cried shrilly. "What d'ye mean?"

She turned on them fiercely.

"Are you goin' to murder a tenderfoot among you? One that ain't done no real harm? I don't believe my eyes. You, there, Shorty Kilrain, I've waited on you with my own hands. You've played the man with me. Are you goin' to play the dog now? Jansen, you was tellin' me about a blue-eyed girl in Sweden; have you forgot about her now? And Calamity Ben! My God, ain't there a man among you to step over here and join the two of us?"

They were shaken, but the memory of Drew quelled them.

"They's no harm intended him, on my honor, Sally," said Lawlor. "All he's got to do is give up his gun—and—and"—he finished weakly—"let his hands be tied."

"Is that all?" said Sally scornfully.

"Don't follow, me, Sally," said Bard. "Stay out of this. Boys, you may have been paid high, but I don't think you've been paid high enough to risk taking a chance with me. If you put me out with the first shot that ends it, of course, but the chances are that I'll be alive when I hit the floor, and if I am, I'll have my gun working—and I won't miss. One or two of you are going to drop."

He surveyed them with a quick glance which seemed to linger on each face.

"I don't know who'll go first. But now I'm going to walk straight for that door, and I'm going out of it."

He moved slowly, deliberately toward the door, around the table. Still they did not shoot.

"Bard!" commanded the voice which had spoken from nowhere before. "Stop where you are. Are you fool enough to think that I'll let you go?"

"Are you William Drew?"

"I am, and you are—"

"The son of John Bard. Are you in this house?"

"I am, Bard, listen to me for thirty seconds—"

"Not for three. Sally, go out of this room and through that door."

There was a grim command in his voice. It started her moving against her will. She paused and looked back with an imploring gesture.

"Go on," he repeated.

And she passed out of the door and stood there, a glimmering figure against the night. Still there was not a shot fired, though all those guns were trained on Bard.

"You've got me, Drew," he called, "but I've got you, and your hirelings—all of you, and I'm going to take you to hell with me—to hell!"

He jerked his gun up and fired, not at a man, for the bullet struck the thin chain which held the gasoline lamp suspended, struck it with a clang, and it rushed down to the table. It struck, but not with the loud explosion which Bard had expected. There was a dull report, as of a shot fired at a great distance, the scream of Sally from the door, and then liquid fire spurted from the lamp across the table, whipped in a flare to the ceiling, and licked against the walls. It shot to all sides, but it shot high, and every man was down on his face.

Anthony, scarcely believing that he was still alive, rushed for the door, with a cry of agony ringing in his ears from the voice beyond the room. One man in all that crowd was near enough or had the courage to obey the master even to the uttermost. The gaunt form of Calamity Ben blocked the doorway in front of Bard, blocked it with poised revolver.

"Halt!" he yelled.

But the other rushed on, Calamity whipped down the gun and fired, but even before the trigger was pulled he was sagging toward the floor, for Bard had shot to kill. Over the prostrate form of the cow-puncher he leaped, and into the night, where the white face of Sally greeted him.

Outside the red inferno of that room, as if the taste of blood had maddened him, he raised his arms and shouted, like one crying a wild prayer: "William Drew! William Drew! Come out to me!"

Small, strong hands gripped his wrists and turned him away from the house.

"You fool!" cried Sally. "Ride for it! You've raised your hell at last—I knew you would!"

Red light flared in all the windows of the dining-room; shouts and groans and cursing

poured out to them. Bard turned and followed her out toward the stable on the run, and he heard her moaning as she ran: "I knew! I knew!"

She mounted her horse, which was tethered near the barn. He chose at random the first horse he reached, a gray, threw on his back the saddle which hung from the peg behind, mounted, and they were off through the night. No thought, no direction; but only in blind speed there seemed to be the hope of a salvation.

A mile, two miles dropped behind them, and then in an open stretch, for he had outridden her somewhat, Anthony reined back, caught the bridle of her horse, and pulled it down to a sharp trot.

"Why have you come?"

Their faces were so close that even through the night he could see the grim set of her lips.

"Ain't you raised your hell—the hell you was hungry to raise? Don't you need help?"

"What I've done is my own doing. I'll take the burden of it."

"You'll take a halter for it, that's what you'll take. The whole range 'll rise for this. You're marked already. Everywhere you've gone you've made an enemy. They'll be out to get you—Nash—Boardman—the whole gang."

"Let 'em come. I'd do this all over again."

"Born gunman, eh? Bard, you ain't got a week to live."

It was fierceness; it was a reproach rather than sorrow.

"Then let me go my own way. Why do you follow, Sally?"

"D'you know these mountains?"

"No, but—"

"Then they'd run you down in twelve hours. Where'll you head for?"

He said, as the first thought entered his mind: "I'll go for the old house that Drew has on the other side of the range."

"That ain't bad. Know the short cut?"

"What cut?"

"You can make it in five hours over one trail. But of course you don't know. Nobody but old Dan and me ever knowed it. Let go my bridle and ride like hell."

She jerked the reins away from him and galloped off at full speed. He followed.

"Sally!" he called.

But she kept straight ahead, and he followed, shouting, imploring her to go back. Finally he settled to the chase, resolved on overtaking her. It was no easy task, for she rode like a centaur, and she knew the way.

CHAPTER XXXI.

NASH STARTS THE FINISH.

THROUGH the windows and the door the cow-punchers fled from the red spurt of the flames, each man for himself, except Shorty Kilrain, who stooped, gathered the lanky frame of Calamity Ben into his arms, and staggered out with his burden. The great form of William Drew loomed through the night.

His hand on the shoulder of Shorty, he cried: "Is he badly burned?"

"Shot," said Kilrain bitterly, "by the tenderfoot; done for."

It was strange to hear the big voice go shrill with pain.

"Shot? By Anthony? Give him to me."

Kilrain lowered his burden to the ground.

"You've got him murdered. Ain't you through with him? Calamity, he was my pal!"

But the big man thrust him aside and knelt by the stricken cow-puncher.

He commanded: "Gather the boys; form a line of buckets from the pump; fight that fire. It hasn't a hold on the house yet."

The habit of obedience persisted in Kilrain. Under the glow of the fire, excited by the red light, the other man stood irresolute, eager for action, but not knowing what to do. A picture came back to him of a ship laboring in a storm; the huddling men on the deck; the mate on the bridge, shrieking his orders through a megaphone. He cupped his hands at his mouth and began to bark orders.

They obeyed on the run. Some rushed for the kitchen and secured buckets; two manned the big pump and started a great gush of water; in a moment a steady stream

was being flung by the foremost men of the line against the smoking walls and even the ceiling of the dining-room. So far it was the oil itself, which had made most of the flame and smoke, and now, although the big table was on fire, the main structure of the house was hardly touched.

They caught it in time and worked with a cheer, swinging the buckets from hand to hand, shouting as the flames fell little by little until the floor of the room was awash, the walls gave back clouds of steam, and the only fire was that which smoldered along the ruined table. Even this went out, hissing, at last, and they came back with blackened, singed faces to Calamity and Drew.

The rancher had torn away the coat and shirt of the wounded man, and now, with much labor, was twisting a tight bandage around his chest. At every turn Calamity groaned feebly. Kilrain dropped beside his partner, taking the head between his hands.

"Calamity—pal," he said, "how'd you let a tenderfoot, a damned tenderfoot, do this?"

The other sighed: "I dunno. I had him covered. I should have sent him to hell. But sure shootin' is better'n fast shootin'. He nailed me fair and square while I was blockin' him at the door."

"How d'you feel?"

"Done for, Shorty, but damned glad that—"

His voice died away in a horrible whisper and bubbles of red foam rose to his lips.

"God!" groaned Shorty, and then called loudly, as if the strength of his voice might recall the other, "Calamity!"

The eyes of Calamity rolled up; the wide lips twisted over formless words; there was no sound from his mouth. Some one was holding a lantern whose light fell full on the silent struggle. It was Nash, his habitual sneer grown more malevolent than ever.

"What of the feller that done it, Shorty?" he suggested.

"So help me God," said the cattleman, with surprising softness, "the range ain't big enough to keep him away from me."

Drew, completing his bandage, said: "That's enough of such talk, Nash. Let it drop there. Here, Kilrain, take his feet; help me into the house with him."

They moved in, the rest trailing behind like sheep after a bell-wether, and it was astonishing to see the care with which big Drew handled his burden, lifting it with the utmost gentleness and placing it at last on his own four-poster bed.

"The old man's all busted up," said little Duffy to Nash. "I'd never of guessed he was so fond of Calamity."

"You're a fool," answered Nash. "It ain't Calamity he cares about."

"Then what the devil is it?"

"I dunno. We're goin' to see some queer things around here."

Drew, having disposed of the wounded man carefully, raising his head on a pillow, turned to the others.

"Who saw Ben shot?"

"I did," said Kilrain, who was making his way to the door.

"Come back here. Are you sure you saw the shot fired?"

"I seen the tenderfoot—damn his eyes!—whip up his gun and take a snap shot which he was runnin' for the door where Calamity stood."

Nash raised his lantern high, so that the light fell full on the face of Drew. The rancher was more gray than ever.

He said, with almost an appeal in his voice: "Mightn't it have been one of the other boys, shooting at random?"

The tone of Kilrain raised and grew ugly.

"Are you tryin' to cover the tenderfoot, Drew?"

The big man made a fierce gesture.

"Why should I cover him?"

"Because you been actin' damned queer," answered Nash.

"Ah, you're here again, Nash? I know you hate Bard because he was too much for you."

"He got the start of me, but I'll do a lot of finishing."

"Kilrain," called Drew, "you're Calamity's best friend. Ride for Eldara and bring back Dr. Young. Quick! We're going to pull Ben through."

"Jest a waste of time," said Nash coolly. "He's got one foot in hell already."

"You've said too much, Nash. Kilrain, are you going?"

"I'll stop for the doctor at Eldara, but then I'll keep on riding."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothin'."

"I'll go with you," said Nash, and turned with the other.

"Stop!" called Drew. "Boys, I know what you have planned; but let the law take care of this. Remember that we were the aggressors against young Bard. He came peaceably into this house and I tried to hold him here. What would you have done in his place?"

"They's a dozen men know how peaceable he is," said Nash dryly. "Wherever he's gone on the range he's raised hell. He's cut out for a killer, and Glendin in Eldara knows it."

"I'll talk to Glendin. In the mean time you fellows keep your hands off Bard. In the first place because if you take the law into your own hands you'll have me against you—understand?"

Kilrain and Nash glowered at him a moment, and then backed through the door.

As they hurried for the barn Kilrain asked: "What makes the chief act soft to that hell-raiser?"

"If you have a feller cut out for your own meat," answered Nash, "d'you want to have any one else step in and take your meal away?"

"But you and me, Steve, we'll get this bird."

"We'll get Glendin behind us first."

"Why him?"

"Play safe. Glendin can swear us in as deputies to—'apprehend,' as he calls it, this Bard. Apprehendin' a feller like Bard simply means to shoot him down and ask him to come along afterward, see?"

"Nash, you got a great head. You ought to be one of these lawyers. There ain't nothin' you can't find a way out of. But will Glendin do it?"

"He'll do what I ask him to do."

"Friend of yours?"

"Better'n a friend."

"Got something on him?"

"These here questions, they ain't polite, Shorty," grinned Nash.

"All right. You do the leadin' in this game and I'll jest follow suit. But play your course with nothin' but the tops'ls flyin', because I've got an idea we're goin' to hit a hell of a storm before we get back to port, Steve."

"For my part," answered Nash, "I'm gettin' used to rough weather."

They saddled their horses and cut across the hills straight for Eldara. Kilrain spurred viciously, and the roan had hard work keeping up.

"Hold in," called Nash after a time; "save your hoss, Shorty. This ain't no short trail. D'you notice the hosses when we was in the barn?"

"Nope."

"Bard took Duffy's gray, and the gray can go like the devil. Hoss-liftin'? That's another little mark on Bard's score."

CHAPTER XXXII.

TO "APPREHEND" A MAN.

As if to make up for its silence of the night before, Eldara was going full-blast when the two reached it late that evening. Kilrain went straight for Doc Young, to bring him later to join Nash at the house of Deputy Glendin.

The front of the deputy's house was utterly dark, but Nash, unabashed, knocked loudly on the door, and went immediately to the rear of the place. He was in time to see a light wink out at an upper window of the two-story shack. He slipped back, chuckling, among the trees, and waited until the back door slammed and a dark figure ran noiselessly down the steps and out into the night. Then he returned, still chuckling, to the front of the house, and banged again on the door.

A window above him raised at length and a drawling voice, apparently overcome with sleep, called down: "What's up in Eldara?"

Nash answered: "Everything's wrong. Deputy Glendin, he sits up in a back room playin' poker and hitting the red-eye. No wonder Eldara's goin' to hell!"

A muffled cursing rolled down to the cow-

puncher, and then a sharp challenge: "Who's there?"

"Nash, you blockhead!"

"Nash!" cried a relieved voice, "come in; confound you. I thought—no matter what I thought. Come in!"

Nash opened the door and went up the stairs. The deputy met him, clad in a bathrobe and carrying a lamp. Under the bathrobe he was fully dressed.

"Thought your game was called, eh?" grinned the cattleman.

"Sure. I had a tidy little thing in black-jack running and was pulling in the iron boys, one after another. Why didn't you tip me off? You could have sat in with us."

"Nope; I'm here on business."

"Let's have it."

He led the way into a back room and placed the lamp on a table littered with cards and a black bottle looming in the center.

"Drink?"

"No time for that now. I told you I came on business."

"What kind?"

"Bard."

"I thought so."

"I want a posse."

"What's he done?"

"Killed Calamity Ben at Drew's place, started a fire that near burned the house, and lifted Duffy's hoss."

Glendin whistled softly.

"Nice little start."

"Sure; and it's just a beginnin' for this Bard."

"I'll go out to Drew's place and see what he's done."

"And then start after him with a gang?"

"Sure."

"By that time he'll be a thousand miles away."

"Well?"

"I'm running this little party. Let me get a gang together; you can swear 'em in and put me in charge. I'll guarantee to get him before morning."

Glendin shook his head.

"It ain't legal, Steve. You know that."

"The hell with legality."

"That's what you say; but I got to hold my job."

"You'll do your part by goin' to Drew's place with Doc Young. He'll be here with Shorty Kilrain in a minute."

"And let you go after Bard?"

"Right."

"Far 's I know, you may jest shoot him down and then come back and say you done it because he resisted arrest."

"Well?"

"You admit that's what you want, Steve?"

"Absolute."

"Well, partner, it can't be done. That ain't apprehendin' a man. It's jest plain murder."

"D'you think you could ever catch that bird alive?"

"Dunno, I'd try."

"Never in a thousand years."

"He don't know the country. He'll travel in a circle and I'll ride him down."

"He's got somebody with him that knows the country better 'n you or me."

"Who?"

The face of Nash twisted into an ugly grimace.

"Sally Fortune."

"The hell!"

"It is; but it's true."

"It ain't possible. Sally ain't the kind to make a fool of herself about any man, let alone a gun-fighter."

"That's what I thought, but I seen her back up this Bard ag'in' a roomful of men. And she'll keep on backin' him till he's got his toes turned up."

"That's another reason for you to get Bard, eh? Well, I can't send you after him, Nash. That's final."

"Not a bit. I know too much about you, Glendin."

The glance of the other raised slowly, fixed on Nash, and then lowered to the floor. He produced papers and Durham, rolled and lighted his cigarette, and inhaled a long puff.

"So that's the game, Steve?"

"I hate to do it."

"Let that go. You'll run the limit on this?"

"Listen, Glendin. I've got to get this Bard. He's outridden me, out-shot me, out-gamed me, out-lucked me, out-guessed

me—and taken Sally. He's mine. He b'longs all to me. D'you see that?"

"I'm only seein' one thing just now."

"I know. You think I'm double-crossin' you. Maybe I am, but I'm desperate, Glendin."

"After all," mused the deputy, "you'd be simply doin' work I'd have to do later. You're right about this Bard. He'll never be taken alive."

"Good ol' Glendin. I knew you'd see light. I'll go out and get the boys I want in ten minutes. Wait here. Shorty and Doc Young will come in a minute. One thing more: when you get to Drew's place you'll find him actin' queer."

"What about?"

"I dunno why. It's a bad mess. You see, he's after this Bard himself, the way I figure it, and he wants him left alone. He'd raise hell if he knew a posse was after the tenderfoot."

"Drew's a bad one to get against me."

"I know. You think I'm double-crossin' with me."

"I'll do it. But this squares all scores between us, Steve?"

"Right. It leaves the debt on my side, and you know I've never dodged an I. O. U. Drew may talk queer. He'll tell you that Bard done all that work in self-defense."

"Did he?"

"The point is he killed a man and stole a hoss. No matter what comes of it, he's got to be arrested, hasn't he?"

"And shot down while 'resistin' arrest'? Steve, I'd hate to have you out for me like this."

"But you won't listen to Drew?"

"Not this one time. But, Lord, man, I hate to face him if he's on the warpath. Who'll you take with you?"

"Shorty, of course. He was Calamity Ben's pal. The rest will be—don't laugh—Butch Conklin and his gang."

"Butch!"

"Hold yourself together. That's what I mean—Butch Conklin."

"After you dropped him the other night?"

"Self-defense, and he knows it. I can find Butch, and I can make him go with me. Besides, he's out for Bard himself."

The deputy said with much meaning: "You can do a lot of queer things, Nash."

"Forget it, Glendin."

"I will for a while. D'you really think I can let you take out Butch and his gunmen ag'in' Bard? Why, they're ten times worse 'n the tenderfoot."

"Maybe, but there's nothin' proved ag'in' 'em—nothin' but a bit of cattle-liftin', maybe, and things like that. The point is, they're all hard men, and with 'em along I can't help but get Bard."

"Murder ain't proved on Butch and his men, but it will be before long."

"Wait till it's proved. In the mean time use 'em all."

"You've a long head, Nash."

"Glendin, I'm makin' the biggest play of my life. I'm off to find Butch. You'll stand firm with Drew?"

"I won't hear a word he says."

"S'-long! Be back in ten minutes. Wait for me."

He was as good as his word. Even before the ten minutes had elapsed he was back, and behind followed a crew of heavy thumping boots up the stairs of Glendin's house and into the room where he sat with Dr. Young and Shorty Kilrain. They rose, but not from respect, when Nash entered with Conklin and his four ill-famed followers behind.

The soiled bandage on the head of Butch was far too thick to allow his hat to sit in its normal position. It was perched high on top, and secured in place by a bit of string which passed from side to side under the chin. Behind him came Lovel, an almost albino type with straw-colored hair and eyes bleached and passionless; the vacuous smile was never gone from his lips.

More feared and more hated than Conklin himself was Isaacs. The latter, always fastidious, wore a blue-striped vest, without a coat to obscure it, and about his throat was knotted a flaming vermilion necktie, fastened in place with a diamond stickpin—obviously the spoil of some recent robbery. Glendin, watching, ground his teeth.

McNamara followed. He had been a squatter, but his family had died of a fever,

and McNamara's mind had been unsettled ever since; whisky had finished the work of sending him on the downward path with Conklin's little crew of desperadoes. Men shrank from facing those too-bright, wandering eyes, yet it was from pity almost as much as horror.

Finally came Ufert. He was merely a round-faced boy of nineteen, proud of the distinguished bad company he kept. He was that weak-minded type which is only strong when it becomes wholly evil. With a different leadership he would have become simply a tobacco-chewing hanger-on at crossroads saloons and general merchandise stores. As it was, feeling dignified by the brotherhood of crime into which he had been admitted as a full member, and eager to prove his qualifications, he was equally as dangerous as any member of the crew.

The three men who were already in the room had been prepared by Glendin for this new arrival, but the fact was almost too much for their credence. Consequently they rose, and Dr. Young muttered at the ear of Glendin: "Is it possible, Deputy Glendin, that you're going to use these fellows?"

"A thief to catch a thief," whispered Glendin in reply.

He said aloud: "Butch, I've been looking for you for a long time, but I really never expected to see you quite as close as this."

"You've said it," grinned Butch, "I ain't been watchin' for you real close, but now that I see you, you look more or less like a man should look. H'wareye, Glendin?"

He held out his hand, but the deputy, shifting his position, seemed to overlook the grimy proffered palm.

"You fellows know that you're wanted by the law," he said, frowning on them.

A grim meaning rose in the vacuous eye of Lovel; Isaacs caressed his diamond pin, smiling in a sickly fashion; McNamara's wandering stare fixed and grew unhumanly bright; Ufert openly dropped his hand on his gun-butt and stood sullenly defiant.

"You know that you're wanted, and you know why," went on Glendin, "but I've decided to give you a chance to prove that you're white men and useful citizens. Nash has already told you what we want. It's work for seven men against one, but that one man is apt to give you all plenty to do. If you are—successful"—he stammered a little over the right word—"what you have done in the past will be forgotten. Hold up your right hands and repeat after me."

And they repeated the oath after him in a broken, drawling chorus, stumbling over the formal, legal phraseology.

He ended, and then: "Nash, you're in charge of the gang. Do what you want to with them, and remember that you're to get Bard back in town unharmed—if possible."

Butch Conklin smiled, and the same smile spread grimly from face to face among the gang. Evidently this point had already been elucidated to them by Nash, who now mustered them out of the house and assembled them on their horses in the street below.

"Which way do we travel?" asked Shorty Kilrain, reining close beside the leader, as though he were anxious to disestablish any relationship with the rest of the party.

"Two ways," answered Nash. "Of course I don't know what way Bard headed, because he's got the girl with him, but I figure it this way: if a tenderfoot knows any part of the range at all, he'll go in that direction after he's in trouble. I've seen it work out before. So I think that Bard may have ridden straight for the old Drew place on the other side of the range. I know a short cut over the hills; we can reach there by morning. Kilrain, you'll go there with me.

"It may be that Bard will go near the old place, but not right to it. Chances may be good that he'll put up at some place near the old ranch house, but not right on the spot. Jerry Wood, he's got a house about four or five miles to the north of Drew's old ranch. Butch, you take your men and ride for Wood's place. Then switch south and ride for Partridge's store; if we miss him at Drew's old house we'll go on and join you at Partridge's store and then double back. He'll be somewhere in-

side that circle and Eldara, you can lay to that. Now, boys, are your hosses fresh?"

They were.

"Then ride, and don't spare the spurs. Hoss flesh is cheaper 'n your own hides."

The cavalcade separated and galloped in two directions through the town of Eldara.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

NOTHING NEW.

GLENDIN and Dr. Young struck out for the ranch of William Drew, but they held a moderate pace, and it was already gray dawn before they arrived; yet even at that hour several windows of the house were lighted, as if in expectation of her coming. They were led directly to Drew's room.

The big man welcomed them at the door with a hand raised for silence. He seemed to have aged greatly during the night, but between the black shadows beneath and the shaggy brows above, his eyes gleamed more brightly than ever. About his mouth the lines of resolution were worn deep by his vigil.

"He seems to be sleeping rather well—though you hear his breathing?"

It was a soft, but ominously rattling sound.

"Through the lungs," said the doctor instantly.

The cow-puncher was completely covered, except for his head and feet. On the latter, oddly enough, were still his grimy boots, blackening the white sheets on which they rested.

"I tried to work them off—you see the laces are untied," explained Drew, "but the poor fellow recovered consciousness at once, and struggled to get his feet free. He said that he wants to die with his boots on."

"You tried his pulse and his temperature?" whispered the doctor.

"Yes. The temperature is not much above normal; the pulse is extremely rapid and very faint. Is that a bad sign?"

"Very bad."

Drew winced and caught his breath so sharply that the others stared at him. It might have been thought that he had just heard his own death sentence pronounced.

He explained: "Ben has been with me a number of years. It breaks me up to think of losing him like this."

The doctor took the pulse of Calamity with lightly touching fingers that did not waken the sleeper; then he felt with equal caution the forehead of Ben.

"Well?" asked Drew eagerly.

"Very little hope. The chances are about one out of ten."

It drew a groan from the rancher.

"But there is still *some* hope."

The doctor shook his head and carefully unwound the bandages. He examined the wound with care, and then made a dressing, and recovered the little purple spot, so small that a five-cent piece would have covered it.

"Tell me!" demanded Drew, as Young turned at length.

"The bullet passed right through the body, eh?"

"Yes."

"He ought to have been dead hours ago. I can't understand it. But since he's still alive we'll go on hoping."

"Hope?" whispered Drew.

It was as if he had received the promise of heaven, such brightness fell across his haggard face.

"There's no use attempting to explain," answered Young. "An ordinary man would have died almost instantly, but the lungs of some of these rangers seem to be lined with leather. I suppose they are fairly embalmed with excessive cigarette smoking. The constant work in the open air toughens them wonderfully. As I said, the chances are about one out of ten, but I'm only astonished that there is any chance at all."

"Doctor, I'll make you rich for this!"

"My dear sir, I've done nothing; it has been your instant care that saved him—as far as he is saved. I'll tell you what to continue doing for him; in half an hour I must leave."

Drew smiled faintly.

"Not till he's well or dead, doctor."

"I didn't quite catch that."

"You won't leave the room, Young, till

this man is dead or on the way to recovery."

"Come, come, Mr. Drew, I have patients who—"

"I tell you, there is no one else. Until a decision comes in this case your world is bounded by the four walls of this room. That's final."

"Is it possible that you would attempt—"

"Anything is possible with me. Make up your mind. You shall not leave this man till you've done all that's humanly possible for him."

"Mr. Drew, I appreciate your anxiety, but this is stepping too far. I have an officer of the law with me—"

"Better do what he wants, Doc," said Glendin uneasily.

"Don't mouth words," ordered Drew sternly. "There lies your sick man. Get to work. In this I'm as unalterable as the rocks."

"The bill will be large," said Young sullenly, for he began to see that it was as futile to resist the gray giant as it would have been to attempt to stop the progress of a landslide.

"I'll pay you double what you wish to charge."

"Does this man's life mean so much to you?"

"A priceless thing. If you save him, you take the burden of murder off the soul of another."

"I'll do what I can."

"I know you will."

He laid the broad hand on Young's shoulder.

"Doctor, you must do more than you can; you must accomplish the impossible; I tell you, it is impossible for this man to die; he *must* live!"

He turned to Glendin.

"I suppose you want the details of what happened here?"

"Right."

"Follow me. Doctor, I'll be gone only a moment."

He led the way into an adjoining room, and lighted a lamp. The sudden flare cast deep shadows on the face leaning above, and Glendin started. For the moment it seemed to him that he was seeing a face which had looked on hell and lived to speak of it.

"Mr. Drew," he said, "you'd better hit the hay yourself; you look pretty badly done up."

The other looked up with a singular smile, clenching and unclenching his fingers as if he strove to relax muscles which had been tensed for hours.

"Glendin, the surface of my strength has not been scratched; I could keep going every hour for ten days if it would save the life of the poor fellow who lies in there."

He took a long breath.

"Now, then, let's get after this business. I'll tell you the naked facts. Anthony Bard was approaching my house yesterday and word of his coming was brought to me. For reasons of my own it was necessary that I should detain him here for an uncertain length of time. For other reasons it was necessary that I go to any length to accomplish my ends.

"I had another man—Lawlor, who looks something like me—take my place in the eyes of Bard. But Bard grew suspicious of the deception. Finally a girl entered and called Lawlor by name as they were sitting at the table with all the men around them. Bard rose at once with a gun in his hand.

"Put yourself in his place. He found that he had been deceived, he knew that he was surrounded by armed men, he must have felt like a cornered rat. He drew his gun and started for the door, warning the others that he meant to go the limit in order to get free. Mind you, it was no sudden gun-play.

"Then I ordered the men to keep him at all costs within the room. He saw that they were prepared to obey me, and then he took a desperate chance and shot down the gasoline lamp which hung over the table. In the explosion and fire which resulted he made for the door. One man blocked the way, leveled a revolver at him, and then Bard shot in self-defense and downed Calamity Ben. I ask you, Glendin, is that self-defense?"

The other drummed his finger-tips ner-

vously against his chin; he was thinking hard, and every thought was of Steve Nash.

"So far, all right. I ain't askin' your reasons for doin' some pretty queer things, Mr. Drew."

"I'll stand every penalty of the law, sir. I only ask that you see that punishment falls where it is deserved only. The case is clear. Bard acted in self-defense."

Glendin was desperate.

He said at length: "When a man's tried in court they bring up his past career. This feller Bard has gone along the range raisin' a different brand of hell everywhere he went. He had a run in with two gunmen, Ferguson and Conklin. He had Eldara within an ace of a riot the first night he hit the town. Mr. Drew, that chap looks the part of a killer; he acts the part of a killer; and by God, he *is* a killer."

"You seem to have come with your mind already made up, Glendin," said the rancher coldly.

"Not a bit. But go through the whole town or Eldara and ask the boys what they think of this tenderfoot. They feel so strong that if he was jailed they'd lynch him."

Drew raised a clenched fist and then let his arm fall suddenly limp at his side.

"Then surely he must not be jailed."

"Want me to let him wander around loose and kill another man—in self-defense?"

"I want you to use reason—and mercy, Glendin!"

"From what I've heard, you ain't the man to talk of mercy, Mr. Drew."

The other, as if he had received a stunning blow, slipped into a chair and buried his face in his hands. It was a long moment before he could speak, and when his hands were lowered, Glendin winced at what he saw in the other's face.

"God knows I'm not," said Drew.

"Suppose we let the shootin' of Calamity go. What of hoss-liftin', sir?"

"Horse stealing? Impossible! Anthony—he could not be guilty of it!"

"Ask your man Duffy. Bard's ridin' Duffy's gray right now."

"But Duffy will press no claim," said the rancher eagerly. "I'll see to that. I'll pay him ten times the value of his horse. Glendin, you can't punish a man for a theft of which Duffy will not complain."

"Drew, you know what the boys on the range think of a hoss thief. It ain't the price of what they steal; it's the low-down soul of the dog that would steal it. It ain't the money. But what's a man without a hoss on the range? Suppose his hoss is stole while he's hundred miles from nowhere? What does it mean? You know; it means dyin' of thirst and goin' through a hundred hells before the finish. I say shootin' a man is nothin' compared with stealin' a hoss. A man that 'll steal a hoss will shoot his own brother; that's what he'll do. But I don't need to tell you. You know it better'n me. What was it you done with your own hands to Louis Borgen, the hoss-rustler, back ten years ago?"

A dead voice answered Glendin: "What has set you on the trail of Bard?"

"His own wrong doin'."

The rancher waved a hand of careless dismissal.

"I know you, Glendin," he said.

The deputy stirred in his chair, and then cleared his throat.

He said in a rising tone: "What d'you know?"

"I don't think you really care to hear it. To put it lightly, Glendin, you've done many things for money. I don't accuse you of them. But if you want to do one thing more, you can make more money at a stroke than you've made in all the rest."

With all his soul the deputy was cursing Nash, but now the thing was done, and he must see it through.

He rose glowering on Drew.

"I've stood a pile already from you; this is one beyond the limit. Bribery ain't my way, Drew, no matter what I've done before."

"Is it war, then?"

And Glendin answered, forcing his tone into fierceness: "Anything you want—any way you want it!"

"Glendin," said the other with a sudden lowering of his voice, "has some other man been talking to you?"

"Who? Me? Certainly not."

"Don't lie."

"Drew, rein up. They's one thing no man can say to me and get away with it."

"I tell you, man, I'm holding myself in harder than I've ever done before. Answer me!"

He did not even rise, but Glendin, his hand twitching close to the butt of his gun, moved step by step away from those keen eyes.

"Answer me!"

"Nash; he's been to Eldara."

"I might have known. He told you about this?"

"Yes."

"And you're going the full limit of your power against Bard?"

"I'll do nothin' that ain't been done by others before me."

"Glendin, there have been cowardly legal murders before. Tell me at least that you will not send a posse to 'apprehend' Bard until it's learned whether or not Ben will die—and whether or not Duffy will press the charge of horse stealing."

Glendin was at the door. He fumbled behind him, found the knob, and swung it open.

"If you double-cross me," said Drew, "all that I've ever done to any man before will be nothing to what I'll do to you, Glendin."

And the deputy cried, his voice gone shrill and high, "I ain't done nothin' that ain't been done before!"

And he vanished through the doorway. Drew followed and looked after the deputy, who galloped like a fugitive over the hills.

"Shall I follow him?" he muttered to himself, but a faint groan reached him from the bedroom.

He turned on his heel and went back to Calamity Ben and the doctor.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CRITICISM.

AFTER the first burst of speed, Bard resigned himself to following Sally, knowing that he could never catch her, first because her horse carried a burden so much lighter than his own, but above all because the girl seemed to know every rock and twist in the trail, and rode as courageously through the night as if it had been broad day.

She was following a course as straight as a crow's flight between the ranch of Drew and his old place, a desperate trail that veered and twisted up the side of the mountain and then lurched headlong down on the farther side of the crest. Half a dozen times Anthony checked his horse and shook his head at the trail, but always the figure of the girl, glimmering through the dusk ahead, challenged and drove him on.

Out of the sharp descent of the downward trail they broke suddenly onto the comparatively smooth floor of the valley, and he followed her at a gallop which ended in front of the old house of Drew. They had been far less than five hours on the way, yet his long détour to the south had given him three days of hard riding to cover the same points. His desire to meet Logan again became almost a passion. He swung to the ground, and advanced to Sally with his hands outstretched.

"You've shown me the short cut, all right," he said, "and I thank you a thousand times, Sally. So long, and good luck to you."

She disregarded his extended hand.

"Want me to leave you here, Bard?"

"You certainly can't stay."

She slipped from her horse and jerked the reins over its head. In another moment she had untied the cinch and drawn off the saddle. She held its weight easily on one forearm. Actions, after all, are more eloquent than words.

"I suppose," he said gloomily, "that if I'd asked you to stay you'd have ridden off at once?"

She did not answer for a moment, and he strained his eyes to read her expression through the dark. At length she laughed with a new note in her voice that drew her strangely close to him. During the long ride he had come to feel toward her as toward another man, as strong as himself, almost, as fine a horseman, and much surer of herself on that wild trail; but now the laughter in an instant rubbed all this away. It was rather low, and with a throaty quality of richness. The pulse of the sound

was like a light finger tapping some marvelously sensitive chord within him.

"D'you think that?" she said, and went directly through the door of the house.

He heard the crazy floor creak beneath her weight; the saddle dropped with a thump; a match scratched and a flight of shadows shook across the doorway. The light did not serve to make the room visible; it fell wholly upon his own mind and troubled him like the waves which spread from the dropping of the smallest pebble and lap against the last shores of a pool. Dumfounded by her casual surety, he remained another moment with the rein in the hollow of his arm.

Finally he decided to mount as silently as possible and ride off through the night away from her. The consequences to her reputation if they spent the night so closely together was one reason; a more selfish and more moving one was the trouble which she gave him. The finding and disposing of Drew should be the one thing to occupy his thoughts, but the laughter of the girl the moment before had suddenly obsessed him, wiped out the rest of the world, enmeshed them hopelessly together in the solemn net of the night, the silence. He resented it; in a vague way he was angry with Sally Fortune.

His foot was in the stirrup when it occurred to him that no matter how softly he withdrew she would know and follow him. It seemed to Anthony that for the first time in his life he was not alone. In other days social bonds had fallen very lightly on him; the men he knew were acquaintances, not friends; the women had been merely border decorations, variations of light and shadow which never shone really deep into the stream of his existence; even his father had not been near him; but by the irresistible force of circumstances which he could not control, this girl was forced bodily upon his consciousness.

Now he heard a cheery, faint crackling from the house and a rosy glow pervaded the gloom beyond the doorway. It brought home to Anthony the fact that he was tired; weariness went through all his limbs like the sound of music. Music in fact, for the girl was singing softly—to herself.

He took his foot from the stirrup, unsaddled, and carried the saddle into the room. He found Sally crouched at the fire and piling bits of wood on the rising flame. Her face was squinted to avoid the smoke, and she sheltered her eyes with one hand. At his coming she smiled briefly up at him and turned immediately back to the fire. The silence of that smile brought their comradeship sharply home to him. It was as if she understood his weariness and knew that the fire was infinitely comforting. Anthony frowned; he did not wish to be understood. It was irritating—indelicate.

He sat on one of the bunks, and when she took her place on the other he studied her covertly, with side glances, for he was beginning to feel strangely self-conscious. It was the situation rather than the girl that gained upon him, but he felt shamed that he should be so uncertain of himself and so liable to expose some weakness before the girl.

That in turn raised a blindly selfish desire to make her feel and acknowledge his mastery. He did not define the emotion exactly, nor see clearly what he wished to do, but in a general way he wanted to be necessary to her, and to let her know at the same time that she was nothing to him. He was quite sure that the opposite was the truth just now.

At this point he shrugged his shoulders, angry that he should have slipped so easily into the character of a sullen boy, hating a benefactor for no reason other than his benefactions; but the same vicious impulse made him study the face of Sally Fortune with an impersonal, coldly critical eye. It was not easy to do, for she sat with her head tilted back a little, as though to take the warmth of the fire more fully. The faint smile on her lips showed her comfort, mingled with retrospection.

Here he lost the trend of his thoughts by beginning to wonder of what she could be thinking, but he called himself back sharply to the analysis of her features. It was a game with which he had often amused himself among the girls of his eastern acquaintance. Their beauty, after all, was their only weapon, and when he discovered

that that weapon was not of pure steel, they became nothing; it was like pushing them away with an arm of infinite length.

There was food for criticism in Sally's features. The nose, of course, was tipped up a bit, and the mouth too large, but Anthony discovered that it was almost impossible to center his criticism on either feature. The tip-tilt of the nose suggested a quaint and infinitely bouyant spirit; the mouth, if generously wide, was exquisitely made. She was certainly not pretty, but he began to feel with equal certainty that she was beautiful.

A waiting mood came on him while he watched, as one waits through a great symphony and endures the monotonous passages for the sake of the singing bursts of harmony to which the commoner parts are a necessary background. He began to wish that she would turn her head so that he could see her eyes. They were like the inspired part of that same symphony, a beauty which could not be remembered and was always new, satisfying. He could make her turn by speaking, and knowing that this was so, he postponed the pleasure like a miser who will only count his gold once a day.

From the side view he dwelt on the short, delicately carved upper lip and the astonishingly pleasant curve of the cheek.

"Look at me," he said abruptly.

She turned, observed him calmly, and then glanced back to the fire. She asked no question.

Her chin rested on her hands, now, so that when she spoke her head nodded a little and gave a significance to what she said.

"The gray doesn't belong to you?"

So she was thinking of horses!

"Well," she repeated.

"No."

"Hoss-lifting," she mused.

"Why shouldn't I take a horse when they had shot down mine?"

She turned to him again, and this time her gaze went over him slowly, curiously, but without speaking she looked back to the fire, as though explanation of what "hoss-lifting" meant were something far beyond the grasp of his mentality. His anger rose again, childishly, sullenly, and he had to arm himself with indifference.

"Who'd you drop, Bard?"

"The one they call Calamity Ben."

"Is he done for?"

"Yes."

The turmoil of the scene of his escape came back to him so vividly that he wondered why it had ever been blurred to obscurity.

She said: "In a couple of hours we'd better ride on."

CHAPTER XXXV.

ABANDON.

THAT was all; no comment, no exclamation—she continued to gaze with that faint, retrospective smile toward the fire. He knew now why she angered him; it was because she had held the upper hand from the minute that ride over the short pass began—he had never once been able to assert himself impressively. He decided to try now.

"I don't intend to ride on."

"Too tired?"

He felt the clash of her will on his, even like flint against steel, whenever they spoke, and he began to wonder what spark would start a fire. It made him think of a game of poker, in a way, for he never knew what the next instant would place in his hands while the cards of chance were shuffled and dealt. Tired? There was a subtle, scoffing challenge hidden somewhere in that word.

"No, but I don't intend to go any farther from Drew."

Her smile grew more pronounced; she even looked to him with a frank amusement, for apparently she would not take him seriously.

"If I were you, he'd be the last man I'd want to be near."

"I suppose you would."

As if she picked up the gauntlet, she turned squarely on the bunk and faced him.

"You're going to hit the trail in an hour, understand?"

It delighted him—set him thrilling with

excitement to feel her open anger and the grip of her will against his; he had to force a frown in order to conceal a smile.

"If I do, it will be to ride back toward Drew."

Her lips parted to make an angry retort, and then he watched her steel herself with patience, like a mother teaching an old lesson to a child.

"D'you know what you'd be like, wanderin' around these mountains without a guide?"

"Well?"

"Like a kid in a dark, lonesome room. You'd travel in a circle and fall into their hands in a day."

"Possibly."

She was still patient.

"Follow me close, Bard. I mean that if you don't do what I say I'll cut loose and leave you alone here."

He was silent, enjoying her sternness, glad to have roused her, no matter what the consequences; knowing that each second heightened the climax.

Apparently she interpreted his speechlessness in a different way. She said after a moment: "That sounds like quittin' cold on you. I won't do it unless you try some fool thing like riding back toward Drew."

He waited again as long as he dared, then: "Don't you see that the last thing I want is to keep you with me?"

There was no pleasure in that climax. She sat with parted lips, her hands clasped tightly in her lap, staring at him. He became as vividly conscious of her femininity as he had been when she laughed in the dark. There was the same sustained, pulsing, vital emotion in this silence.

He explained hastily: "A girl's reputation is a fragile thing, Sally."

And she recovered herself with a start, but not before he saw and understood. It was as if, in the midst of an exciting hand, with the wagers running high, he had seen her cards and knew that his own hand was higher. The pleasant sense of mastery made a warmth through him.

"Meaning that they'd talk about me? Bard, they've already said enough things about me to fill a book—notes and all, with a bunch of pictures thrown in. What I can't live down I fight down, and no man never says the same thing twice about me. It ain't healthy. If that's all that bothers you, close your eyes and let me lead you out of this mess."

He hunted about for some other way to draw her out. After all, it was an old, old game. He had played it before many a time; though the setting and the lights had been different the play was always the same—a man, and a woman.

She was explaining: "And it *is* a mess. Maybe you could get out after droppin' Calamity, because it was partly self-defense, but there ain't nothin' between here and God that can get you off from liftin' a hoss. No, sir, not even returning the hoss won't do no good. I know! The only thing is speed—and a thousand miles east of here you can stop ridin'."

He found the thing to say, and he made his voice earnest and low to give the words wing and sharpness; it was like the hum of the bow string after the arrow is launched, so tense was the tremor of his tone.

"There are two reasons why I can't leave. The first is Drew. I must get back to him."

"Why d'you want Drew? Let me tell you, Bard, he's a bigger job than ten tenderfeet like you could handle. Why, mothers scare their babies asleep by tellin' of the things that William Drew has done."

"I can't tell you why. In fact, I don't altogether know the complete why and wherefore. It's enough that I have to meet him and finish him!"

Her fingers interlaced and gripped; he wondered at their slenderness; and leaning back so that his face fell under a slant, black shadow, he enjoyed the flame of the firelight, turning her brown hair to amber and gold. White and round and smooth and perfect was the column of her throat, and it trembled with the stir of her voice.

"The most fool idea I ever heard. Sounds like something in a dream—a nightmare. What d'you want to do, Anthony, make yourself famous? You will be, all right; they'll put up your tombstone by a public subscription."

He would not answer, sure of himself; waiting, tingling with enjoyment.

As he expected she said: "Go on; is the other reason as good as that one?"

Making his expression grim, he leaned suddenly forward, and though the width of the room separated them, she drew back a little, as though the shadow of his coming cast a forewarning shade across her. He heard her breath catch, and as if some impalpable and joyous spirit rushed to meet and mingle with his, something from her, a spirit as warm as the fire, as faintly, keenly sweet as an air from a night-dark, unseen garden blowing in his face.

"The other reason is you, Sally Fortune. You can't go with me as far as I must go; and I can't leave you behind."

Ah, there it was! He had fumbled at the keys of the organ in the dark; he had spread his fingers amply and pressed down; behold, back from the cathedral lofts echoed a rising music of surpassing beauty. Like the organist, he sank back again in the shadow and wondered at the phrase of melody. Surely he had not created it? Then what? God, perhaps. For her lips parted to a smile that was suggested rather than seen, a tender, womanly sweetness that played about her mouth; and a light came in her eyes that would never wholly die from them. Afterward he would feel shame for what he had done, but now he was wholly wrapped in the new thing that had been born in her, like a bird striving to fly in the teeth of a great storm, and giving back with reeling, drumming wings, a beautiful and touching sight.

Her lips framed words that made no sound. Truly, she was making a gallant struggle. Then she said: "Anthony!" She was pale with the struggle, now, but she rose bravely to her part. She even laughed, though it fell short like an arrow dropping in front of the target.

"Listen, Bard, you make a pretty good imitation of Samson, but I ain't cut out for any Delilah. If I'm holding you here, why, cut and run and forget it."

She drew a long breath and went on more confidently: "It ain't any use: I'm not cut out for any man—I'd so much rather be—free. I've tried to get interested in others, but it never works."

She laughed again, more surely, and with a certain hardness like the ringing of metal against metal, or the after rhythm from the peal of a bell. With deft, flying fingers she rolled a cigarette, lighted it, and sat down cross-legged.

Through the first outward puff of smoke went these words: "The only thing that's a woman about me is skirts. That's straight."

Yet he knew that his power was besieging her on every side. Her power seemed gone, and she was like a rare flower in the hollow of his hand; all that he had to do was to close his fingers, and— He despised himself for it, but he could not resist. Moreover, he half counted on her pride to make her break away.

"Then if it's hopeless, Sally Fortune, go now."

She answered, with an upward tilt of her chin: "Don't be a fool, Anthony. If I can't be a woman to you, at least I can be a pal—the best you've had in these parts. Nope, I'll see you through. Better saddle now—"

"And start back for Drew?"

There was the thrust that made her start, as if the knife went through tender flesh.

"Are you such a plumb fool as that?"

"Go now, Sally. I tell you, it's no use. I won't leave the trail of Drew."

It was only the outward stretch of her arm, only the extension of her hand, palm up, but it was as if her whole nature expanded toward him in tenderness.

"Oh, Anthony, if you care for me, don't stay in reach of Drew! You're breaking—"

She stopped and closed her eyes.

"Breakin' all the rules, like any tenderfoot would be expected to do."

She glanced at him, wistful, to see whether or not she had smoothed it over; his face was a blank.

"You won't go?"

"Nope."

He insisted cruelly: "Why?"

"Because—because—well, can I leave a baby alone near a fire? Not me!"

Her voice changed. The light and the life was gone from it, but not all the music. It was low, a little hoarse.

"I guess we can stay here to-night without no danger. And in the morning—well, the morning can take care of itself. I'm going to turn in."

He rose obediently and stood at the door, facing the night. From behind came the rustle of clothes, and the sense of her followed and surrounded and stood at his shoulder calling to him to turn. He had won, but he began to wonder if it had not been a Phyrric victory.

At length: "All right, Anthony. It's your turn."

She was lying on her side, facing the wall, a little heap of clothes on the foot of her bunk, and the lithe lines of her body something to be guessed at—sensed beneath the heavy blanket. He slipped into his own bunk and lay a moment watching the heavy drift of shadows across the ceiling. He strove to think, but the waves of light and dark blotted from his mind all except the feeling of her nearness, that indefinable power keen as the fragrance of a garden, which had never quite become disentangled from his spirit. She was there, so close. If he called, she would answer: if she answered—

He turned to the wall, shut his eyes, and closed his mind with a Spartan effort. His breathing came heavily, regularly, like one who slept or one who is running. Over that sound he caught at length another light rustling, and then the faint creak as she crossed the crazy floor. He made his face calm—forced his breath to grow more soft and regular.

Then, as if a shadow in which there is warmth had crossed him, he knew that she was leaning above him, close, closer; he could hear her breath. In a rush of tenderness, he forgot her beauty of eyes and round, strong throat, and supple body—he forgot, and was immersed, like an eagle winging into a radiant sunset cloud, in a sense only of her being, quite divorced from the flesh, the mysterious rare power which made her Sally Fortune, and would not change no matter what body might contain it.

It was blindingly intense, and when his senses cleared he knew that she was gone. He felt as if he had awakened from a night full of dreams more vivid than life—dreams which left him too weak to cope with reality.

For a time he dared not move. He was feeling for himself like a man who fumbles his way down a dark passage dangerous with obstructions. At last it was as if his hand touched the knob of a door, he swung it open, entered a room full of dazzling light—himself. He shrank back from it; closed his eyes against what he might see.

All he knew, then, was an overpowering will to see her. He turned, inch by inch, little degree by degree, knowing that if, when he turned, he looked into her eyes, the end would rush upon them, overwhelm them, carry them along like straws on the flooding river. At last his head was turned; he looked.

She lay on her back, smiling as she slept. One arm hung down from the bunk and the graceful fingers trailed, palm up, on the floor, curling a little, as if she had just relaxed her grasp on something. And down past her shoulder, half covering the whiteness of her arm, fled the torrent of brown hair.

He rose, and dressed with a deadly caution, for he knew that he must go at once, partly for her sake that he must be seen apart from her this night—partly because he knew that he must leave and never come back.

He had hit upon the distinctive feature of the girl—a purity as thin and clear as the air of the uplands in which she drew breath. He stooped and smoothed down the blankets of his bunk, for no trace of him must be seen if any other man should come during this night. He would go far away—see and be seen—apart from Sally Fortune. He picked up his saddle.

Before he departed he leaned low above her until the dark shadow of lashes was against her cheek. Then he straightened and stole step by step across the floor, to the door, to the night; all the myriad small white eyes of the heavens looked down to him in hushed surprise.

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.

Doc Danvers Tries Persuasion

by

Dale Manning Brown

SHOULD some convulsion of nature remove the town of Bartle from its present location to the effete East, it would appear as a blot. In the picturesque West it might be termed a settlement. But framed as it is by thousands of acres of South Dakota wheat and McClelland's slough, it is a county seat of some prominence.

Besides the drug-stores (dens of iniquity) and Eddie Yost's cottage (also a den of iniquity) there are, in Bartle County, three distinct points of interest: Bailey's Lake, an unusually fine frog-pond; the court-house at Bartle—and Doc Danvers. As this story has nothing to do with either the frog-pond or the court-house, let us concentrate on Doc, with slight allusions to the dens of iniquity.

Doc is heavily upholstered—quite the most enormous man in the county. He is also the most feared and best beloved; an inveterate reformer of human beings, with methods unique and effective. He has been in our midst for more than twenty years and what we know of his life before he came to us you could write on the back of a two-cent stamp.

We know that he came from Madison, Wisconsin, and we suspect that a woman had something to do with his coming, for there have been occasions in those twenty years when Doc has been startled from a close, longing scrutiny of a little leather-bound photograph of a woman. And though Doc's heart is as great as his huge body and there is no bitterness in him, any one with half an eye can see that the heart has been battered in some fashion.

Doc owns a great deal of Bartle County—no one knows just how much—and on what he does not own Joe Main, president of the bank, holds mortgages. When I say, therefore, that Doc and Joe, with Harry Alt, editor of the *News*, and Sam Bond, our county attorney, manipulate practically everything and every one in this section, save the Northwestern Railroad, I am not far wrong.

What time these four are not actually manipulating they are gathered in Doc's musty little office planning indignities upon the commonwealth. Thus informally banded together in friendship and design, the quartet is known far and wide as the Big Four. Their activities for social betterment are varied, and this is a narration of one of them. Doc, as usual, and by virtue of his position as chief scoundrel, holds the limelight; and by a curious twist of fate he was boomeranged in a not unpleasant fashion.

One night recently the Big Four were assembled in Doc Danver's office. They

were minus coats, hats, and collars, and were disposed about the small room as best suited their individual preferences.

"I guess we'll have to persuade Jim to turn over a new leaf," Doc rumbled, apropos of the subject of discussion: a big young farmer comparatively "new" to the country.

Joe Main smiled broadly.

"It can't be done," he declared. "Jim Sherwood isn't of the stuff that can be persuaded to do anything. He's bull-headed and contrary."

Sam Bond nodded agreement, and Alt ventured:

"It looks as though something should be done. Jim's got a fine little woman, and he's square—so far. Too bad to let a man like that go to the dickens with booze and cards."

"It is as certain as I own that farm he's on," Doc said. "First thing you know he'll go to pieces, and I might lose some money. Besides, we've got a reputation to uphold; and I'm interested, anyhow, because he's a good deal like I was—once. Nope. Got to persuade him."

"How?" Main mildly inquired.

Doc leaned over and took a dictionary from the table.

"Well, let's see the meaning of persuade," he suggested. "Here! Here it is. 'Persuade: to influence by argument, advice, entreaty; draw or incline the will of; *et cetera.*'"

"Webster was far-sighted when he put that *et cetera* in it," Sam drawled. "Think you can do that to Jim?"

"I shouldn't be surprised, Sam," grinned Doc. "I'll try 'em all, but I expect it 'll get down to the *et cetera*. I wish you fellows 'd go home now; I'm sleepy."

Thus enjoined, Bond, Main and Alt departed, and Doc stretched out on a dilapidated couch in the office and proved his contention.

Nine o'clock the following morning found him headed for the farm, three miles from Bartle, which he rented on shares to Jim Sherwood. He found Jim cursing a mule in the barn—evidence that he had, the previous evening, lost both money and sleep, and a certain amount of sobriety.

"Morning, Jim," was Doc's greeting. "What's the trouble?"

"Well, for one thing, Doc, this blankety-blank mule—" began Sherwood, when Doc interrupted. Being direct in diplomacy he came at once to the point.

"Jim, do you reckon if you had stayed home last night, instead of contributing to Eddie Yost's percentage and filling your hide with booze, that mule would not have been so untractable?"

Sherwood neglected the mule and brought his gaze to bear upon the fat man. Practically new to the country and somewhat ignorant as to Doc's peculiarities—few people cared to speak of them—his gorge began to rise.

"I suppose you're one of these blasted reformers that go around nosing into other men's affairs that don't concern you at all?" he inquired acidly.

"I don't suppose that what you suppose interests any one," Doc retorted. "Shortly you'll realize that what I suppose is a blamed sight more important. I don't object to gambling, Jim, if a man can afford it, mentally, physically, maritally, and financially, and the same is true of drink. But you're one of these fellows that never know they're burnt till they're scorched to a cinder; and I want to remind you that you've got a wife and that I want a good crop off of this place."

Sherwood's face was as red as his barn. But he held himself in and told Doc to go to thunder; and Doc sighed and mopped his face with a handkerchief.

"All right," he conceded. "Then I won't have to waste time arguing, advising, entreating, or drawing the will of. There is nothing like a thorough understanding. Hereafter, I shall resort to *et cetera*."

Then he waddled out to his runabout, climbed in and set off for Bartle; Sherwood, a puzzled expression on his face, watching him out of sight.

Arrived in town, Doc dismounted in front of Hammet's general store and joined the proprietor inside.

"Bill," he said, "no more credit to Jim Sherwood. He's boozing and gambling, and, first thing we know, we'll all lose. I can't talk him into decency—at least, he

said I couldn't; so we'll try a few other methods."

"Big Four?" Hammet mildly inquired.

"Big Four," Doc said solemnly. "Mind, now!"

In turn the fat man visited each and every emporium in Bartle, his ultimatum identical with that to Bill Hammet. After which he called on Sam Bond and Harry Alt, informing them of his action. Main, he visited last.

"Well, I've started in to *et cetera* Jim," he confided to the banker. "I've put the kibosh on him at the stores."

"What for?" Joe inquired.

"So you can lend him some money," grinned Doc. "Has he got any?"

"Mighty little. He's been drawing out pretty heavily. I've been expecting him in, anyhow, for a loan."

"Well, make it a good one," Doc advised. "Insist on giving him so much that he can't pay it back for a good while. It's for his own good. I'll take up the note. I want him under obligations to me."

Joe shook his head over that, but forebore to ask questions.

"All right," he agreed. "But—why not pass the word to Eddie and the drug-stores?"

"No good," retorted the fat man. "If we shut him off here he'd drive forty miles for a drink and a game, just to show us we can't run his habits. He needs an awful shock—and he's going to get it if things break right."

At it happened, Sherwood received something of a shock when, the following day, he drove in for supplies. Hammet's was his first stop, and old Bill himself took the order and wrapped the groceries. They were ready when Sherwood came for them, but when he would have carried them out to his wagon Bill interposed.

"Cash!" he said tersely.

"Cash!" Jim nearly dropped the sack of flour balanced precariously on his shoulder. "What do you mean—cash?"

"Sorry," confessed Hammet, "but your credit has bumped into a stone wall about forty feet high."

And neither entreaty nor profanity could move him.

Sherwood encountered the same difficulty at other stores; except the drug-stores, the oases of supposedly liquorless Dakota. Even for contraband cash was not required, and Jim's mental state demanded consolation, if only in liquid form. When, in mid-afternoon, he appeared before Doc Danvers he was flushed and dangerously quiet. The gleam in his eye was not nice to see, and the things he told Doc were not nice to hear. Doc listened patiently, and, at the conclusion of Sherwood's remarks, merely said:

"They tell me, Jim, that your name on a slip of paper is as good as a bond. How about it?"

"You know it is," flared Sherwood. "I've never laid down on that sort of obligation yet, and I'm mighty careful what I put my name to."

"Well," went on Doc, "when you sign a pledge—just between us—to leave the cards and booze alone till you pay what you owe me, I'll drop out."

In view of the fact that he owed Doc mighty little Sherwood gasped his astonishment.

"I don't know what you're getting at," he growled, "but I wouldn't sign that if I didn't owe you a cent. You can't drive me or bully me."

"Fine!" agreed Doc. "I thought you were built that way, but I wanted to hear you say so. Next time the terms will be higher."

Sherwood scratched his head thoughtfully over that, but could make nothing of it, and after roasting Doc a while longer with no apparent effect he went away.

It was the next afternoon when he appeared before Joe Main and informed the banker that he was not only broke, but sadly in debt, and he reckoned he would have to make a raise. Joe hemmed and hawed a good deal, finally loaning Sherwood a round five hundred dollars on a bay mule, a walking plow, a hay-rake and several other indispensable farm implements. Jim expressed his gratitude; and, to show how fast he was falling, instead of squaring his bills at the various stores, he wandered into Eddie's with the most innocent intention in the world—and got

dragged into a game by that unholy fascination it holds for some men.

Joe Main went across to Doc's office with the note in his pocket, and the fat man took out a check-book and paid the note on the spot.

"That lets you out," he said, "and it gives me a half-hold on the scruff of Jim's neck."

Of course, Doc learned of Sherwood's squandering, but if it worried him he gave no sign. The further in debt Jim got the better it suited the fat man, although it did anger him that the farmer should prove so weak at a time when he should have been strong for the sake of his wife. It was not surprising that a man of the type of Sherwood should go to pieces in a hurry, but Doc felt that he should have postponed his maniacal intention until a more propitious moment.

Doc knew something about Mrs. Jim; and he knew that just then she was in need of her husband's mental and moral support.

That, however, would have ruined Doc's plan, so he accused himself of inconsistency and sat back to await the psychological moment.

Apropos of that moment: Doc took the one other physician of Bartle into his confidence, and, because they were friends, Dr. Samuels grinned broadly at the fat man's proposal.

"I'll do it," he agreed, "providing you clear me in case they learn that I might have answered the call. That ought to fetch him, hadn't it? And it's really your case, anyhow; they've never had me."

"They'll call you this time, I imagine," growled Doc. "They'll be sore at me."

A few days later, when he knew Sherwood was in town, Doc stole out to the farm. The result of that visit was a frank statement from Mrs. Jim that he needn't bother; they wouldn't call him in as long as Dr. Samuels was on earth.

Doc only grinned at the open hostility and bet himself a dollar that Mrs. Jim didn't know what she was talking about. He was secretly pleased to discover that her husband's dereliction had had no effect upon her. Apparently she had philosophically resigned herself to Jim's inevitable downfall and determined not to fret over something that no power on earth could avert. She was a sweet, pretty little woman, with a lot of good sense; and she knew her husband for a man quite set in his ways, who invariably finished what he started.

Thus everything was nicely primed for Jim's reformation; and fate was certainly with the fat man, for the machinery started grinding on a night when Sherwood, partially illuminated, sat at Eddie Yost's table and imagined that he was playing draw-poker. It was an hallucination and a not altogether pleasant one; it was too expensive.

Doc, in his musty office, answered the phone-call and grinned at the response to his bellowed "Hello!"

"Oh, you're with Mrs. Sherwood, eh? No, I won't! Too busy. She told me Doc Samuels—what? Can't come? H-m! All right, I'll be out pretty soon. You stay with her. Jim? Sure; I'll bring him."

Surprisingly agile for a fat man is Doc. He fairly ran from the office, along the street to Eddie Yost's cottage above the hotel, and around to a rear door, where he gave three taps, token of the initiated. The door opened and he stepped within. As he had expected, Sherwood was one of a group at Eddie's green-topped table; and Doc leaned above him.

"Excuse yourself, will you, Jim?" he whispered. "It's important."

Sherwood looked up and scowled.

"You can't say anything to interest me," he grumbled. "I'm busy."

Doc shot a glance at Eddie.

"Put him out of the game, Eddie," he commanded. "This is a life and death affair."

"I can't do that, Doc. He's—"

"You'll do it damned quick," cut in the fat man quietly, "or I'll have this shack down over your ears before morning."

Oh, yes; Doc is effective! Eddie acted promptly, and Jim, half sobered and sensing an urgency in Doc's action, gave up his seat and hurried with the fat man to the latter's office. There Doc waved him to a chair, while he pulled the shades and locked the door, Sherwood staring wonderingly the while.

"And now," growled Doc, "you hang onto those chair-arms while I tell you something about yourself."

"What do you mean?" growled Sherwood. "What's—"

"Shut up!" Wrath flared in the fat man, and for a time he towered above Sherwood and unbosomed himself of the tirade festering for weeks in his breast.

"Now," he concluded, "your wife not only needs you, but she needs me; understand that? She phoned Samuels and he couldn't go out; and she's got to have a doctor mighty soon—to-night—and she can't get one."

If there was any befuddlement in Sherwood's brain it dissipated instantly. He was white and shaky when he got to his feet and faced Doc.

"But you—why, you'll come, won't you?" he stammered. "I—I didn't expect it so soon, Doc. You'll come, won't you?"

"No, I won't! I told whoever called up that I wouldn't. Why in hell should I interest myself in you—except to get my share of that crop, eh?"

"But—my Lord, Doc! You can't—"

"Can't I?" snapped Doc. "Watch me, you drunken fool! And she'll likely die, Jim—get that? Nice thing to face when you're sober, eh?"

Sherwood, panting, dropped back into the chair.

"God! Don't!" he pleaded. "I know—I've been—I'm not that way now, Doc. Why, Lil needs you!" He sprang up and grasped Doc's arms. "I'll—you're joking, aren't you? You don't mean—"

"I mean," rasped the fat man, "that I won't go one step to save her unless you sign that pledge I spoke of the other day. And I give you fair warning that my bill for this job 'll be the highest any doc ever tried to charge in this neck of the woods!"

You would suppose, under the circumstances, that any human being would jump at that proposal, wouldn't you? Doc Danvers had really supposed so. And you would be wrong, just as Bartle's huge physician was wrong.

To Doc's surprise—so much to his surprise that he was on the verge of surrender—Sherwood's face drew into hard lines and his eyes flamed red. Shoulders hunched, fists clenched, he glared at Doc.

"Don't you ever think I'll pay your price," he growled. "Get out of my way! Get out, I say! I'll see whether Samuels refuses to come, once I get my hands on him! I reckon I can drag him—and kill him if I have to!"

He made a wild dash for the door, but Doc's arm shot out and hurled him back.

"Then you don't go," snapped Doc. "I didn't know the Almighty made things as low down as you are. I'll try to fix up His job a bit. You don't go, Jim; not till you decide to be a white man.

"Your wife and that kid are going to need a man from now on—not a *thing*. If I had a girl married to you I'd thank somebody for beating the life out of you and some sense into you. Besides, I set out to persuade you and I never fell down on a job yet!"

Men in Bartle could have told Sherwood of the marvelous muscles buried somewhere beneath Doc's flesh; of the great skill at fisticuffs that he had brought with him from the East years before and still possessed by virtue of tomfoolery with clubs, dumbells, and a bag; in short, of the futility of battering at Doc's giant body. But apparently no one had enlightened Jim, which, in view of what he endured in the next few minutes, was really too bad.

Doc stood, a huge, grinning giant of a man, in fornt of the door, looking not at all formidable despite his bulk. And Sherwood, madder than the proverbial hatter, growled like some animal and hurled himself forward—to be met by a battering ram blow that catapulted him back across the floor.

He brought up thuddingly against the wall, shook himself from his bewilderment, and eyed Doc in wonder. The fat man laughed softly.

"Come on, Jim," he invited tauntingly. "Pshaw! I thought you were a man—physically, at any rate. Come on, yellow! I can't afford to have your sort of tenant on my farm."

This time Jim advanced cautiously. Doc, his arms swinging, watched curiously, much as a cat watches a mouse it has cuffed. For

a moment Sherwood danced before the fat man, feinting. Then, as an opening appeared, he launched a blow; and Doc, dodging quickly, planted his right fist in the place that would do the most damage, doubling Sherwood to the floor.

The farmer came groggily erect, a light of madness in his eyes; and ere Doc could interfere he had seized a chair, swung it above his head and let it go. It crashed into the wall, missing the fat man by a hair's breadth.

Then Doc acted; and the details of that early morning battle in the musty little office would be disagreeable reading. It is enough to say that Sherwood, battered, bruised, slithering in his own blood, broken at last in spirit and body, fearful not alone for his wife, but for himself, affixed his signature to the document Doc put before him.

It was necessary that Doc support him and guide his hand, but it was done of Jim's own free will—in fact, at his earnest, very earnest, request. And when it was done, Doc, to Sherwood's wonder and later self-abasement, dropped into a chair and, burying his head in his huge palms, shook with sobs that racked him from head to toe.

That was only for a moment, however; and in the next the fat man was on his knees beside Jim, with water and cloth washing the stains of battle from Sherwood's face. He said nothing; neither did Jim. But in a very few minutes the farmer was fairly presentable, and Doc stooped, lifted him and carried him out to the flivver. Sherwood was conscious—and that was about all that could be said of him.

The ride to the farm is epochal in Bartle history; and the speed record established by Doc Danvers remains unchallenged, so far as I know.

Jim, rather plastic, but self-navigable, stumbled into the house at Doc's heels; and in the front room two women from a neighboring farm met them, not without some apparent amazement at Sherwood's dilapidated condition.

"It's all right," growled Doc. "Jim slipped on the landing and fell down Sam Bond's stairway. "It's darker 'n blazes on that landing! How's the girl?"

Without awaiting reply, he slipped into the bedroom. A moment later he thrust forth his head, ordered the women to come to his assistance and Jim to stay where he was.

"You're no use in here," he grinned. "Better lie down and I'll call you later. That fall shook you up pretty badly."

Incidentally, the Sam Bond stairway theory is all that any one in Bartle has ever got from Doc in explanation of Jim's battered countenance.

Sherwood did not lie down. He spent a seeming eternity wandering about the house, onto the porch, across the yard. In reality, it was just two hours after his arrival when Doc came from Mrs. Jim's room, in his hands a wee mite of humanity, whose lusty greeting to the world at large had, for fifteen minutes, rooted Sherwood to one spot, his wondering gaze glued to the bedroom door.

"By gosh, it's a boy!" grinned Doc. "Hear that yell, will you? Isn't that great—eh? Here! Want to heft him?"

"My God, no!" said Sherwood—and meant it. "Not—not yet. Just let me look at him. What's he yell like that for?"

Doc's silent scorn was all the answer he got; a moment's inspection was all he was granted ere the fat man turned back into the room with a brief "Come on" to the new arrival's father.

Dawn was creeping across the wheatland when, finally, Doc took Sherwood by the arm and led him onto the porch.

"Jim," he said quietly, "I want to tell you a little story. Once I had a wife and a baby, and one vice—cards; and I was just about the sort of fellow you've been. I remember my father-in-law told me I needed a good shock; either physical or mental—didn't make any difference, so it woke me up to the fact that I could be licked—mastered!

"Get the idea? I laughed at him, and I smashed; and then I woke up and decided the dad-in-law had known what he was talking about. I got the shock when my baby was a year old and my wife said she wanted me to get out of their lives, and stay out. I got out and stayed, because I wasn't a coward. But the shock came too

late and I haven't seen my folks since I left 'em back in Madison, Wisconsin. It cured me, but, my God, Jim, what a scar it left!

"I've always blamed my wife's father for not taking a club and teaching me that I could be licked; and as your dad-in-law wasn't handy, I thought I'd fill his boots. I'd want somebody to do that for my girl's man, because I feel it's good medicine if a man isn't yellow.

"Nobody 'll know about this, Jim," he went on. "I've fixed it for you at the stores, and I've taken up your note already. Next time you're in we'll fix up an extension for about twenty years. Then you'll be safe if the old itch comes back.

"That pledge may sort of help out; it would me. And about the bill for to-night —well, if you ever ask about it I'll make it so blamed stiff that that new son of yours even won't live long enough to pay it. And if you ever need any help come to me!"

He started for his car. Jim reached out and grabbed his arm; tried to say something and failed miserably. But he saw a grin spread across Doc's face and a light in Doc's eyes that made him feel more a man than he had felt in many months.

"Jim," said the fat man, "*et cetera* is like the stingaree on a hornet; it comes last. But it's all fired effective. So long."

Again he started away and again Sherwood grabbed at his arm; and Doc, turning, wondered at the gleam in Jim's eye and the apparent excitement that for a moment held the farmer speechless.

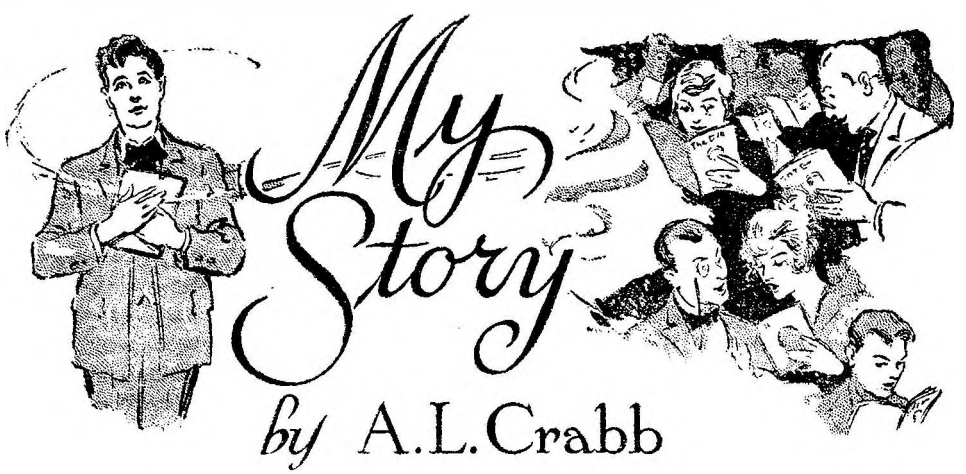
"Did—did you say Madison?" Sherwood finally managed to stammer; and when Doc nodded: "Well—why, that's where we're from—Madison, Doc! My wife; her name was Danvers. Her mother's dead; but her husband—they never knew where he went, Doc; and there are a lot of Danverses. We never thought—"

I have it from Jim that Doc's fat, red face went white as a sheet; and that his eyes stuck out like those of a mortally wounded frog. And Sherwood says that the hands of Bartle's huge physician shook so that he could scarcely find the pocket kept sacred for the little leather-bound photograph. But he brought it to light at last from an inner pocket and held it out for Jim's inspection.

"That—that's the mother of my baby," he said softly.

Jim took one look and pressed the little picture back upon the fat man. And he smiled—a smile that caused Doc to collapse, trembling, upon the porch step.

"You didn't step into anybody's boots but your own," said Sherwood. "That was the mother of my girl in there."



I WROTE a story. I had written many, but this one an editor accepted. He went further than that—he printed it. He was a human editor, and so he sat down and mailed me a copy. Otherwise I could not have owned one, as I had used the check as a part-payment on the delicatessen bill.

I read the story lovingly through, and then, with winged feet, I traveled to the home of a dear friend.

"Fine rain," he observed laconically as I entered. I ignored the vulgar reference to the weather.

"Here it is—the story I wrote!" I exclaimed. "I have brought it to you, that with your own eyes you may read it."

"You wrote it!" he gasped. "You! Fine! A real author! Great! Say, you ought to see my garden since the rain—I mean your story is a bird. I just know it will be the stuff. Wasn't that thunder? A little more would help. I'll read it right now."

Late that afternoon I returned to the home of my friend. He would have finished with my story. When he had extolled its virtues amply he would hand it back to me, and I would pass it on, so as to give it the widest possible publicity. The community was going to know about that story or I'd know why.

As I neared the house I heard voices.

"Yes," my dear friend was saying, "I've always predicted that Simpkins had a future. Absolutely! One of the coming authors I should say. My garden has grown three inches since the rain. A little more and I'll supply this town with vegetables. I haven't had time to read the story, but you take it and read it, if you want to."

"Oh, may I?" cooed a voice, which I recognized as belonging to Miss Pansy McClure, our esteemed milliner. "Think of knowing a real live author! Just think of it, living on the same street with him! Isn't it romantic! Just like a movie! It is a peach of a story, isn't it?"

My dear friend evidently deliberated:

"Well," he said finally, "I haven't read it yet, to tell you the truth. I had to transplant some tomato plants, and we are going to have company for supper. So, you take it and enjoy it, and I'll get at it later." I turned around and quietly retraced my steps homeward. I couldn't understand why my dear friend hadn't read my story, but he had certainly pulled a coup in passing it on to Miss McClure. Ample word of it would be spread to the limits of the town within twelve hours. As a disseminator of news, Miss McClure would make a town crier appear meek and retiring. I could visualize her reading the story with manifest eagerness, and then, rushing to the telephone to tell her friends about it and also about the author.

I went to bed, but I couldn't go to sleep. As I lay there I planned a serial, the heroine of which should, by all means, be engaged in the millinery business. Early the next morning I boarded a car for down-town. My schedule for the day was to meet, accidentally, as it were, Miss McClure, and receive first-hand felicitations. Then I should make arrangements against the financial stringency which something told me would exist prior to the sale of my forthcoming serial. Later I would return home and begin work on my serial in earnest.

A fat man boarded the car. Observing that the car was crwoded, I moved over and shared my seat with him. Mechanically I noted that he was loudly dressed, and an entire stranger to me. Suddenly I came out of my reverie and sat up with a snap. The gentleman had taken a magazine from his pocket and turned to a story. My story! Also, it was my magazine—the identical one I had loaned my dear friend, as I recognized from some pencilings which I had made at random. The man observed my interest.

"Say," he began, "that story is a peach. I haven't read it yet, but I know the kind of stuff it has got in it. Pansy McClure lent it to me. She didn't have time to read it, with her season just opening up. Say" —and there was added vigor in the tone— "I'm a little rushed for time to-day. You take the magazine and read that story. You'll find it a hummer. Simpkins is a personal friend of mine. Got a future, too."

I took the proffered magazine and left the car. While down-town I accepted a place as waiter in the Hot Dog Eating Emporium and Chili Parlor.

My serial is not fully planned. But I have decided, however, that the heroine shall not be a milliner, that the hero shall not be a fat man, and I shall pay absolutely no attention to the weather.

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

IN the tales that used to delight us in those happy days when we wore knickerbockers—provided, of course, that we were members of the masculine sex—the books that our fond parents provided for us taught us that the bully is always a coward. How many a puny youth, we wonder, conscious of the right of his cause, has carried this theory into practise—at the cost of varying degrees of bodily injury? For in real life the bully isn't always a coward—very often he is a man of more than usual physical courage, quite as ready to tackle a husky of his own stamp as to beat up a weakling. But in one respect, at least, the books of our childhood were right—the bully lacks a certain moral force that must be in the make-up of a real man.

In the next issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY you will find the first instalment of a four-part serial, the story of the struggle for the heart of a girl waged by two men, one mighty physically, the other with only ordinary bodily strength, but with the heart of a giant. Be sure not to miss the opening chapters of

NO FEAR

BY CAPTAIN DINGLE

Author of "The Clean Up," "The Pirate Woman," "Steward of the Westward," etc.

Strong men are Captain Dingle's favorite characters; and few writers are so well qualified to tell of them. A sailor of long experience, his profession took him into many strange ports, and into close contact with men in the raw. His ability to make these men live in a story as vividly as they lived in real life, together with his knowledge and love of the sea and his keen "story" sense, has made him one of the most popular authors on the long and distinguished list of ALL-STORY WEEKLY contributors. This latest tale from his pen is in every way up to the standard of—to borrow a term from the sporting pages—his past performances, and will be enjoyed thoroughly by every one who loves stirring fiction.

NO one believes the end justifies the means or that you may do evil that good may come of it. Such principles are Hunnish, and history furnishes many striking object-lessons to what red-hell a man may come who acts on either motive. But all our studies in modern psychology have not exhausted the secret springs of action or wholly justified *Hamlet's* lament, "Conscience makes cowards of us all." Conscience covers so vast a multitude of motives it is hazardous to venture on generalizations.

Man has learned to drive his conscience as readily as he manipulates his reason. A clever man is as full of reasons for what he wants or does as a woman is of emotions. Logic has as little to do with a woman's conduct as reason has with a man's. In the one case we call it instinct or intuition; in the other passion or desire. This is not to say there are no logical women, no reasonable men. But since conduct is three-fourths of life, the hidden springs of action for the generality of us turn on neither reason nor conscience. Most of us are led by convention, by habit, by example, and most of all by undisciplined desire. What was the motive of Mrs. Trayler's extraordinary conduct we leave you to gather for yourself from the context of next week's very striking novelette:

A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE

BY EDWINA LEVIN

Author of "The Devil's Riddle," "Deep Waters," etc.

That this is a story worthy of the notice of any one who can appreciate the best in current fiction is evident from the author's name. Edwina Levin

has not been a prolific contributor to these pages, but our readers have just enough of her work to know how to value a story from her pen. This particular story will justify your highest expectations, and we commend it to you without reservations. Mrs. Trayler and her trouble, to say nothing of her conscience, will give you something to think about. Was she controlled by reason and logic, or conscience or passion? We refuse to communicate our own secret opinion lest we destroy the keen edge of your own independent investigation. Of course she—but speculation is interminable. Meet Mrs. Trayler next week and decide for yourself.

"SWEET LAVENDER," Raymond Lester's story in next week's magazine, would seem to call for old lace and fans and furniture. We are not certain about the lace and the fans, but we are positive about the furniture. They were a loving pair who dealt in antiques, and he was as mellow and mild as one of his old prints. How can one inhale the faded splendor of the past, dwell among the moldy monuments of a bygone age, and keep the high heart and the fresh enthusiasm for the present? One is bound to decay, gracefully. Do you think so? Let Raymond Lester show you how mistaken you are! This is a charming story with a new kind of hero.

CULTURED people who have an unmitigated contempt for the Peter Bells who see in a primrose nothing more than a yellow flower are themselves often Peter Bells in another direction. How many people there are to whom our great Western desert is merely a cruel stretch of sand and sun and blinding light! People who have never pierced to the soul of the desert and read its secret, or felt its magic! If you want to see with the eyes of a lover the wonderful face of the desert, read Doncaster George Humm's "SILKY SPINES" in next week's magazine. This is an arresting little sketch, a good story and a marvelously sympathetic understanding of one of our little appreciated natural wonders.

A PRETTY little tale which will please the universal appetite for sentiment and romance is Louis Benson Seltzer's "LOVE IN BOOTS." This gifted son of a gifted father, evidently intends to walk in father's footsteps. On its own merits, however, we recommend this yarn to you, which will be found in next week's magazine. Salesmen in general and shoe men in particular will find this story particularly to their liking. Now you think you know all about it? Guess again and then compare your guess with the original.

PEOPLE who know horses well, love horses. Almost any man who has had much to do with them has many a good story about their cleverness, their loyalty and their gentleness to their masters. It's a poor cavalryman who will admit that his mount has a superior in the whole troop, and fortunes change hands every year because of the eagerness of many people to back with real money their opinions as to the comparative speed of race horses. Horse-lovers will like especially one of the stories in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY—"BLACK NED—STATE TROOPER," by Frank A. Halverson. In fact, it's a lively, readable tale that every one who reads it will like. You had better be one of them, don't you think?

SERIALS THE BACKBONE OF A MAGAZINE.

TO THE EDITOR:

I guess it won't be intruding too much if I "horn" in for a little chat on the good quality of stories you are giving your friends—for friends we are, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and I, and I look forward to Thursdays like a kitten does to its saucer of milk. For I know there is more nourishment for my brain in store. I read the Heart to Hearts first, to see what other people think of the stories, and I at times smile when I read where some one dislikes a story and gives it a whooping big knock when it happens to be the very story that I enjoyed so much. Don't knock, dear readers, for we all cannot see things in the same light, and perhaps some one else found the story the best suited to their taste of fiction.

If any one has a knock against Hulbert Footner's "On Swan River," please tell me what they call a good story? I admire Mr. Footner's way of writing a story immensely. I simply lived with them (*Stoner* and *Claire* and faithful old *Mary Moosa*) throughout the story, and I was more in suspense than *Stoner* was for fear *Claire* would not regain her memory and the "fake *Dr. Embry*" (*Hooliam*) would demand her to go with him. The "Curse of Capistrano," by J. McCull, was an ideal story, and "Fang Tung, Magician" was certainly worth sitting up late for. And now I am reading "Comrades of Peril," and I think my hair will turn to wire from standing on end so much, if *Shelby* don't find a way to get *Olga* out of the outlaw den and the wolf's hole and into civilization again.

I certainly can boost the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, for I never in all my life was so attached to a magazine, and I would not exchange a copy of it for any three magazines on the market. Above all, Mr. Editor, please don't think of taking our serial stories away, or even one a week, for they are the backbone of the magazine. The shorts are fine, but as many others say, they end too soon. As for my likes and dislikes: gives me any kind of a story full of "pep" and romance of a sensible nature, and I am content. But if I have a choice it is Western stories, and a good comedy occasionally, but not too often. "Broadway Bab" was my idea of a real good comedy drama. Hoping I haven't been boresome here, and this

misses the well-filled waste-basket, I remain an ALL-STORY WEEKLY booster.

MRS. PEARL E. ARNOLD.

Birmingham, Alabama.

LIKES SHORT STORIES

TO THE EDITOR:

Most of us enjoy an occasional short story, and the writer is no exception. A good story, well told, is a refreshing relaxation from the daily grind of business or profession, but unfortunately the average writer lacks originality, or fails to impart that crispness or pungency which characterizes the work of the finished artist. I am happy to say, however, that these criticisms cannot fairly be leveled against the charming and well-told story entitled, "Censored," which appeared in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY of October 4

I do not recall having seen the work of the authors—Diana and Morris Turk—in any previous issue, and it possibly may be their first contribution. Without pretending to pose as a competent critic, may I be permitted to express the opinion that their story is one of unusual merit, possessing at the same time originality, individuality, and a crisp, terse literary style, only too rarely encountered. I can honestly say that it was the most interesting and absorbing short story which I have ever read in your highly valued periodical, and I have no doubt many of your readers will agree with me.

ELSIE S. WESSEL.

West Eighty-Seventh Street, New York.

A. MERRITT TAKES "TEN BAKERIES"

TO THE EDITOR:

At last I've decided to write to you. I don't know why I have never written before, so I'll take occasion now to throw a few bouquets at you. You surely deserve them, for you are giving us some great stuff nowadays. For that matter you have never, since I have been a reader, given us anything but the best.

The best story, I believe, I ever read in your magazine was A. Merritt's classic, "The Conquest of the Moon Pool." Mr. Merritt takes not only the cake, but about ten bakeries along with it. What an admirable power of imagination Mr. Merritt must have to conceive such a setting. But there was more than imagination and setting to that story. It was very cleverly written. It held the reader as a magnet holds a needle.

About a sequel, I think one could wish for nothing that would please him more if he were interested, and if any who read that story or started to read it and didn't finish it were not interested, then, in plain words, where they ought to have some imagination, they have an absolute vacuum. After *Larry* has told *Lakla* so much of Ireland, she must be anxious to see it.

And after what *Larry* went through with *Dr. Goodwin*, and after the peril of the *Shining One* is gone, does it stand to reason that the good old *Doc* is going to come away and not try with every means in his power to open the Moon Door? Or if he does come away, won't it be for aid? Come on, Mr. Merritt, we're pulling hard for you; give us a sequel, won't you?

As for the kickers, ha! ha! Honestly, I feel sorry for them. Are they that hard to please that they cannot find something that interests them in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY? And their cry of "it is impossible." That's a big joke on them. Are they yet so uneducated that they have not found out that nothing is impossible in this cozy little world of ours? People of Jules Verne's time must have called his "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea" impossible, but to-day we have cute little subs flirting with the fish.

If this terrible attempt at a letter happens to get in the Heart to Heart Talks, the following passage will make your readers think me a nut. But, Mr. Editor, I don't care what any one thinks. Do you believe that in all the vast space surrounding us, that of all the planets in the universe, old Mother Earth is the only one that sustains life? I don't, and wouldn't, I don't believe, for all the scientists in the world. Some day we are going to have a merry chat with the inhabitants of some other planet. Now, as I guess you are getting ready to hurl this at the waste-basket, I'll shut off the gas. And so wishing the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and the other Munsey publications much good luck, and hoping for many more issues like the October 11 one, I am, yours most sincerely,

J. DECATUR MAYS, JR.

El Mora, New Jersey.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

Enclosed please find postal money-order for one dollar, for which renew my subscription to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three months beginning October 27. I have been a subscriber to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for over two years, and a constant reader eleven years, and think it the best fiction magazine in existence. I have little use for knockers and growlers; of course, some stories are better than others, but they are all good. Max Brand's stories of the Northwest are unexcelled, and the "Peter Gross" stories cannot be beat. I think we ought to have a sequel to "The Untamed" and the "Conquest of the Moon Pool." Practically all are good stories, and many of them get under the skin, and a man or woman is better for having read them. Long live the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Wishing continued success,

Hensley, Arkansas. BEN NEWELL.

This is my first attempt at telling you how much I like your magazine. But who could keep silent after reading "Next Door to Chastina"? To my notion it is one of the most refreshing short stories I ever have seen printed. Please give us some more just like it. I am a homesteader and certainly wouldn't do without my ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

Where is the "Texan"? There are many of us waiting for him. "The Untamed" was fine, and I think it was finished up fine. Give us some more like it, and like "Broadway Bab," and "The Clean-Up." I like those, and stories like "The Ivory Pipe," which is just starting much better than the "Moon Pool" stories. However, some like those best, and I for one preferred the "Conquest of the Moon Pool" to "The Mouthpiece of Zitu." "Fang-Tung, Magician" was fine, I think; but I see where next week we have an E. K. Means's story, and oh, boy! I'm waiting as patiently as I can. How about a real up-to-date airplane story? Hope there is room for this in ALL-STORY WEEKLY. ELDORA T. BENNETT.

Bridger, Montana.

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for six years, and write these few lines to say I like the magazine better than any other published. I have seen a good many letters in the back of the magazine, but I do not know if they are real or not. Let me see a real exciting story about golf, with a flourishing end, as I am an assistant professional and a great golf enthusiast.

HAROLD HICK.

88 Dalgreen Place, Brooklyn, New York.

I want a sequel to the "Girl in the Golden Atom." I see a great many readers in Heart to Heart Talks are requesting a sequel to this exceptionally good story. Can't you prevail upon the author to give us one?

Would also like to see a sequel to "The Untamed" and "The Conquest of the Moon Pool," which, by the way, was the most wonderful story I ever read. I really enjoy the "different" stories most of all, and am always glad when a new one starts. I like all the stories, however, and could scarcely tell which I like best. But I do prefer serials to the short story. I am an old reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. I started with the *Cavalier*, way back in 1908, and was on the job when it joined the *All-Story*, and when the ALL-STORY WEEKLY made its début alone again I was still faithful, and would rather miss any other magazine than it, anyway. LORIN MOORE.

Hurley, South Dakota.

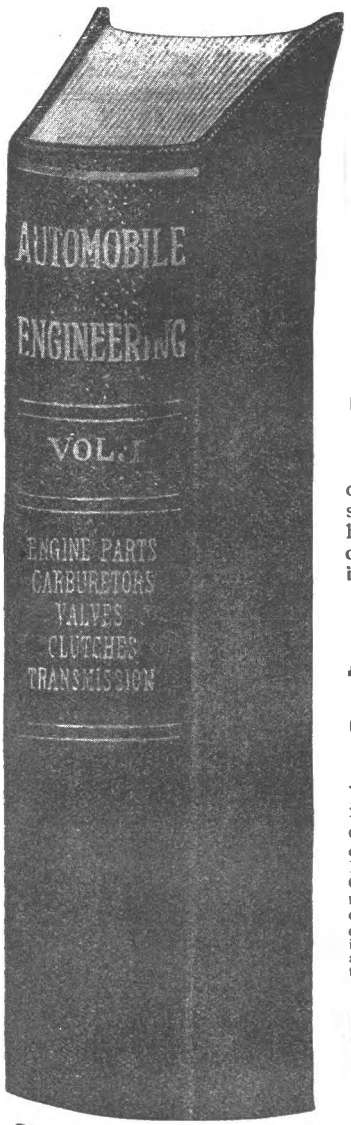
My mother takes the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and we all think it's the best magazine published. We have regular fights to see who is going to read it first when it comes. I am a shut-in. Have been sitting in a wheel-chair twenty-eight years. If any of the readers have any good reading matter, please send the papers along. I live four miles from town, and I enjoy reading in the winter; all kinds of reading would be thankfully received.

Irving, New York. BESSIE PARKER.

I thank Mr. Dearborn, of Bridgeport, for favoring us with his views on the projection of the astral body, but did not intend to convey the impression that I did not like "The Mouthpiece of Zitu." Far from it. It was a fine story, and I enjoyed it immensely, but, in my opinion, however good that story may have been, "The Lord of Death" was better.

I liked McCully's "Curse of Capistrano," but it was decidedly inferior to "Broadway Bab." Was glad to see that the latter has been published in book form. "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" was another of your truly great stories. One cannot say too much for its many fine points. I hope in the future to renew my acquaintance with *Larry*, *Lakla*, and *Dr. Goodwin* through the medium of your magazine. I would like to know if this story has been or will be published in book form. "Into the Infinite," by Austin Hall, was a very interesting story, but was poor in spots. Please tell Franklin to hurry up with another of his comedy serials. His stories are all to the mustard. DELWIN R. HALLOCK.

108 Waverly Street, Yonkers, New York.



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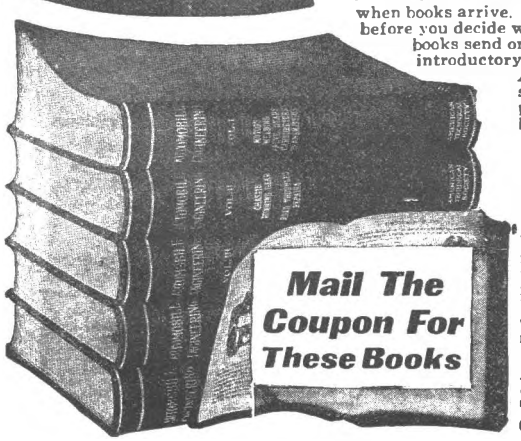

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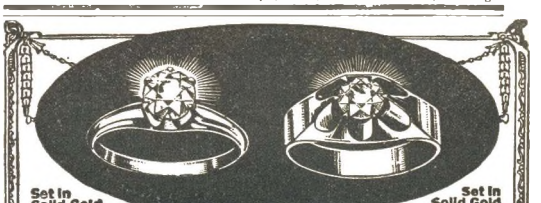

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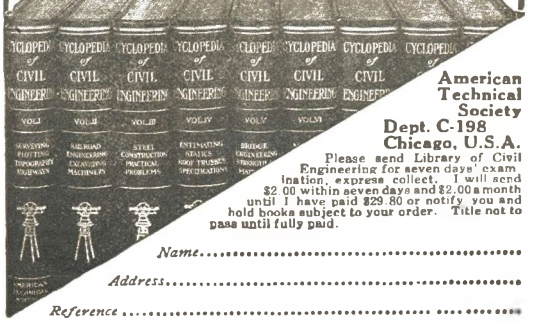

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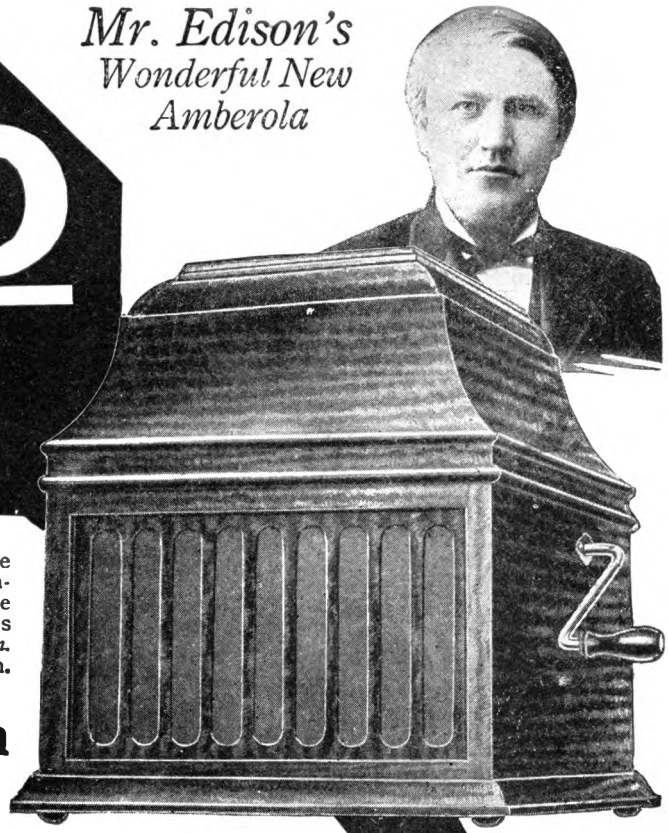

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