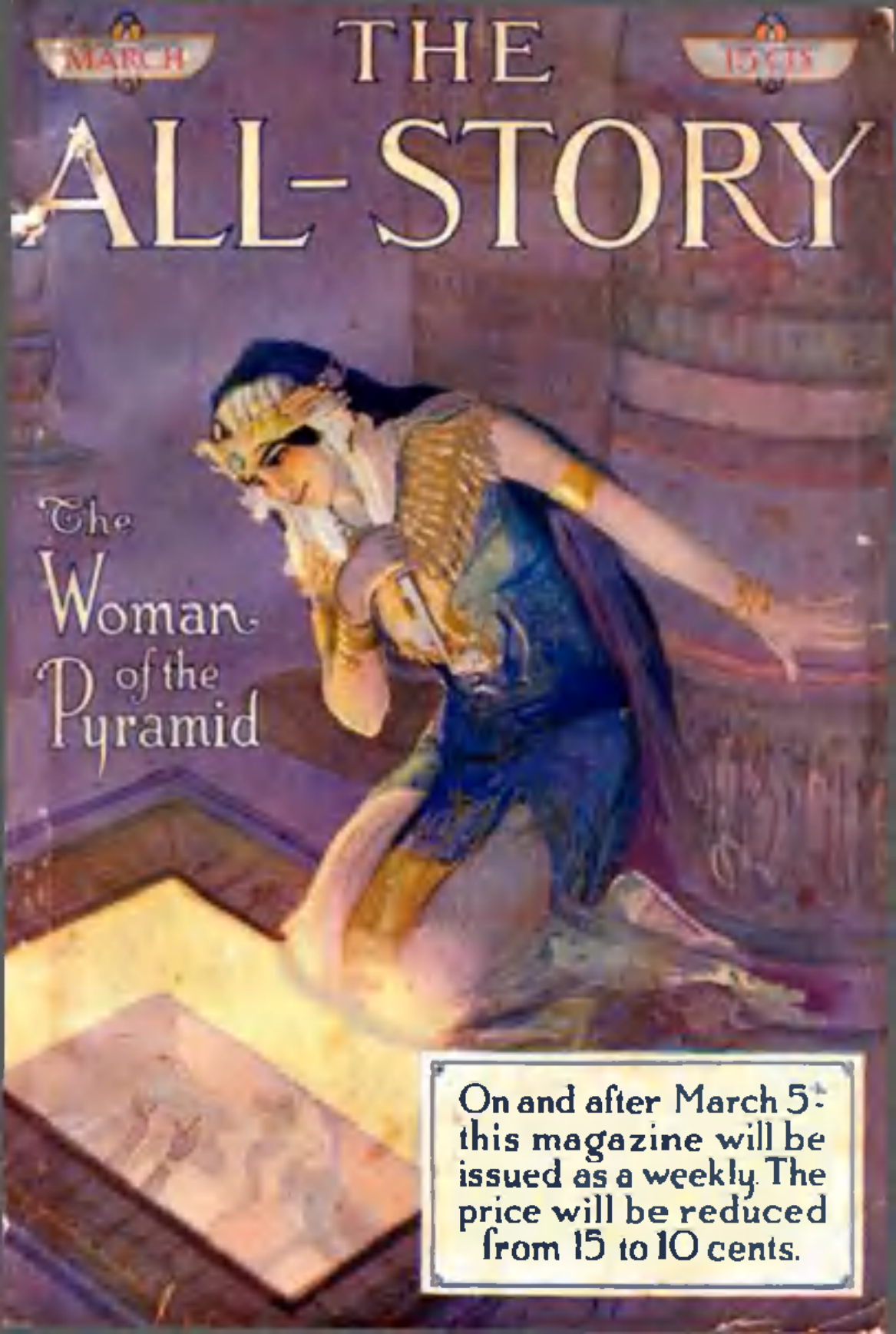
MARCH

THE ALL-STORY



The Woman of the Pyramid

On and after March 5 this magazine will be issued as a weekly. The price will be reduced from 15 to 10 cents.

THE ALL-STORY

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THE ALL-STORY

VOL. XXVIII MARCH, 1914. No. 3

The Woman of the Pyramid

by Perley Poore Sheehan

A FULL BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

CARLTON SEES HER AGAIN.

THERE is no question as to whether he saw her or merely thought that he saw her. Such questions, constantly rising in every one's experience, can never be settled, anyway.

There is that well-known brain-expert in Berlin, for example, who even goes so far as to say that half the things that we think we see, in the course of a day's ramble, are nothing but so many illusions. Again, there is that army of professors who claim that everything we see is an illusion.

Let us hasten to remark, however, that this is not a scientific treatise. It is the simple, unvarnished narrative of George Carlton, once of California, sometimes of New York, and occasionally of Cowes, in which latter place his wife's people are well and favorably known in the yachting set.

Let us not anticipate.

George wasn't married then. He and Alice Wentworth were delightfully dawdling away a sunshiny afternoon at a restaurant in the Bois de Boulogne. One of Alice's aunts was also there.

Alice, who herself was as English as a cup of tea—clear complexion, violet eyes, fine-spun "apricot" hair—had all manner of aunts. They are more particular about aunts in merry England than elsewhere—especially when a girl belongs to a wealthy and somewhat aristocratic family, and her father and mother happen to be dead.

The present aunt, albeit she was the best of souls, is of no great consequence. Suffice it to say that she was ultra-respectable, detested suffrage, managed to worry along with not more than a half-dozen servants when at home, and spent most of her time trailing round with Alice wherever the will of this sweet and exceedingly attractive child of fortune happened to lead her.

That also had become the chief occupation of Carlton, ever since he had met her on a friend's yacht at Cannes.

They were sitting there—the three of them—in that happy daze which is apt to fall upon well-situated visitors to the Bois de Boulogne on sunshiny afternoons. The Tzigane orchestra was zimming and swirling through one of those unwritten rhapsodies for which Tziganes are famous — weird sort of music with all sorts of haunting tremors and quavers and minor chords in it.

Probably no one had spoken for the last fifteen minutes. They were perfectly content with each other. Even the aunt was content with Carlton—now that her solicitor had furnished her with a private report as to the unexceptional standing of Carlton "in the States." Away back in Revolutionary days there had been a younger son of a great house, and he was the ancestor of the American Carltons.

Every now and then Carlton was touching the tip of Alice's little finger with the tip of his little finger—quite accidentally, of course—when suddenly he gave a start, leaned forward, was rigid for a second or two with absorbed attention. Alice saw the erstwhile careless hand grip the table, then relax. She swept her violet eyes upon him.

It was just about settled by this time that they were to be married, and she had begun to show those first delicate, timid burgeons of wifely care.

"What is it?" she asked.

Her own listlessness had disappeared. Perhaps there had flashed through her mind the thought that she did not know this man she was willing to marry quite so well as she thought she did. Anyway, she had seen something in his face that would have made any woman a bit uneasy.

Aunt Mary, her eye on a group at another table, among whom were some people whom she thought she recognized, had let the incident pass unnoticed.

Carlton relaxed, let out an uneasy little laugh, again touched the smooth, pink tip of Alice's little finger.

"What was it, George?" she repeated. "Really, you looked as though you had seen a ghost."

Said Carlton: "Maybe I did."

"See a ghost? How absurd!"

There was a shade of reproach in Alice's violet eyes, but there was a kindling of interest there as well. Carlton was always so dreadfully dramatic.

According to most of Alice's friends all Americans were picturesque. Carlton was not picturesque. So far as manners and looks were concerned, he was certainly far above the average. But he was always doing surprising things, saying surprising things like that.

"Maybe I did," he repeated softly as his level, gray eyes met hers, with only the barest suspicion of humor in them.

Neither did Alice smile. She looked back at him seriously, trying to comprehend. That was a quality of hers—one of many—which had convinced Carlton that very first afternoon that they had ever met that she was the one girl in the world with whom he could ever possibly get along.

"Tell me," he went on softly and still quite seriously, "did you notice that woman who just passed—there, between those two clumps of oleanders, or whatever they are?"

"You frighten me," said Alice, her voice but little more than a whisper. "Bur-r-r! Your tone, your question, and this weird music. What did she look like?"

"Green eyes and straight brows—black!"

"Bur-r-r!" went Alice again.

"Uncanny, all right," said Carlton. "Something imperious about her—something Egyptian — cattish, cruel, beautiful, but — oh, you know — the lady-villain at Drury Lane, only more so."

Up to this time Miss Wentworth's interest, though genuine enough, might have been classed as academic. But it

had obviously become suddenly more than that. The delicate pink of her complexion—the kind you hardly ever see except in England and the American Northwest—had quickly receded, then rushed back again a little more pronounced than before. She had swept a rapid, tremulous glance around her.

"No, I didn't see her," she said. "Tell me about her."

Carlton lit a cigarette, repeated that uneasy little laugh of his, glanced at the blissfully complacent aunt—unconscious she of any mystery greater than the family receipt for Christmas puddings—then back at Alice.

"I told you that I had seen my ghost," he remarked.

"My ghost, too!"

Alice might have said this. Those were the words which had flashed into her mind, but she kept her silence. After all, it could have been a mere coincidence. She had regained her equanimity.

"How was she dressed?" she asked.

"You can't tell how a ghost is dressed unless you have time to look. I only had a glance—clearer, this time, than before: still, only a glance."

"You insist?"

"On nothing, my Rose of Sharon, if it's going to upset you. Only, if I am to be a victim of delusions, I'm honor bound to tell you."

"Tell me, anyway."

"Three times now," said Carlton, disguising his obvious seriousness by a light motion of his hand into the air, in case the aunt might be looking—"three times now, and each of the times when I was in your blessed company—which isn't surprising, seeing how close I stick round — I've either seen, or thought I saw, this same creature."

While he spoke the orchestra swooned and palpitated in a delirium of enchantment.

"Perhaps this confounded music has gone to my head," said Carlton. "There was music on the other two occasions, as well—this same sort of music, crazy and wild. I suppose that Beethoven could stir up one sort of ghost—blue, angelic; and Sousa another. But this sort of music is hers—savage, Egyptian."

"The Pembertons are also going to Egypt," said Aunt Mary, catching the last word and wishing to be polite.

By the time that the young people had smiled at her and nodded, she had relapsed once more into the comfortable lethargy of a well-fed dowager.

"Do you remember when we dined at the Savoy? I saw her then—just that glance—same impression of green eyes and black brows—queer, striking, slightly ghoulish. Big dining-room, lots of people moving about, especially women, I not noticing any of them but you, naturally, until the ghost appears.

"I shouldn't have noticed her, then, if it hadn't been for the odd way she looked at me, my feeling that I had seen her before. Looked again and she was gone."

"Could it be—" Alice began.

"You are going to ask me for a scientific explanation," said Carlton. "But the very fact of my having studied psychology, psychiatry and things makes me all the more chary of trying to explain. As a fledgling scientist I, for one, am ready to admit that science doesn't know a blessed thing about the insides of our heads at all."

"And the other time?"

"The same thing, only a trifle more so. Do you remember that evening in Munich when we were walking back from the opera—moonlight, wonderful air, crowds, fragments of *Aïda* still mingling all round? Well, just before we came to the hotel I saw her again—that same level, inscrutable look from her green eyes, very close to us, general impression of wealth and good taste, yet bizarre. As soon as I could I turned to look after her. She had disappeared."

"Could it be—" Alice began again, and this time Carlton didn't interrupt her. "Could it be telepathy?"

"It could be telepathy," the American assented good-naturedly, "if you knew such a creature and happened to be thinking about her. But, of course, you—"

He paused, the slight suggestion of banter in his face and voice going out a she saw how the pink in Alice Wentworth's face again fled under his scrutiny.

"Listen," she whispered tremulously, while she forced a smile. "I also have something to tell. Oh, could it, could it be that you speak of my Aunt Rhodopis?"

CHAPTER II.

AUNT RHODOPIS.

WHEN Carlton had referred to himself as a "fledgling scientist," he had done scant justice to himself.

As a matter of fact, if he had been forced to earn his living he could have been doing so since a long time either in private practise or in connection with any of the large hospitals which make a specialty of nervous and mental diseases. He had always had a passion for such things, and if his money had prevented him from pursuing his profession with any degree of regularity, it had at least permitted his development along another line.

This particular line was that field of research which most scientists regard as beyond the frontier of legitimate research; who stick to the old régime, anyway, whatever their private beliefs might be, for fear of seeing themselves driven away from the scientific fleshpots on the charge of being cranks or dreamers.

It takes money, as well as courage, to be a follower of such scientific freebooters as Hudson and Sir Oliver Lodge.

Carlton had both money and courage. He also had—or, at least, his friends were all ready to concede that he had—a fair amount of intellect as well.

And Carlton could see no good reason why he should not investigate the uncharted hills and valleys of the far West of science as boldly as his grandfather had investigated the hills and valleys of California. His grandfather had found a gold mine or two. Why shouldn't he?

He had started out with spiritualism, had worked his way—figuratively speaking—up to East Indian magic and back again. Until Alice Wentworth became the all-absorbing theme of his observations, he had been a pretty frequent visitor at the big hospitals of London, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna.

In the course of his life, up to the present, there was just one word which he loved and feared, a word that at once ensnared his passionate interest and yet filled him with contemptuous despair. This word was "occult."

He had a consuming thirst for everything that this much-abused word predicated. He had a horror, none the less, of the charlatans who delight in its use.

It was through this personality—here so slightly and poorly limned—that Carlton again flashed his interest upon the extremely fair, subtle, and responsive creature at his side.

"Your Aunt Rhodopis?" he exclaimed. "Have I met her?"

Alice shook her head. There had come a disquieting moisture into her eyes, but she smiled.

"Not unless"—she faltered—"not unless this is she."

"Tell me what she looks like."

"She looks like what you say this ghost of yours looks like. At least, that is the way I remember her."

"How long is it since you have seen her?"

"Not for years—not since I was twelve."

"Eight years," Carlton calculated. "You and she are not on good terms."

"None of us are on good terms with Aunt Rhodopis. She is queer, terrible."

"Not mad?"

"No, not mad. In fact, she is a very remarkable woman, I believe, in many respects. Lives in a great old house—a regular museum filled with Egyptian treasures. She travels a good deal—out East—is something of an Oriental herself."

"She looks like—"

"The devil," Alice flared. "Beautiful, in a way—green eyes, straight brows, but somehow bizarre—just as you described that ghost of yours."

"Not a blood relation of yours?" Carlton suggested.

"Yes, of my mother's. Very distant, I fancy, though it was my Aunt Rhodopis who cared for me after my mother's death."

"So you came to know her well."

Alice shook her head.

"My only memory of her is as a mystery—a dark mystery."

"But kind?"

Again Alice shook her head, while the delicate pink stain crept from cheek to temple, then back again. Her next words came in a mere breathing whisper.

"She struck me."

"Good Lord!"

There was that about the way that Alice had delivered her last bit of information which meant that the blow had been no mere spanking of a wayward child.

Whatever might have been the dark secret and the dark character of Aunt Rhodopis, the present aunt conveyed no sense of aristocratic middle age, as she beamed upon the two young people at the table with her. She had just come out of a pleasant reverie of meeting Colonel Pemberton and his estimable family during the season at Cairo.

She glanced first at her niece, then at the young man. Mr. Carlton was really quite presentable—quite presentable even though he were an American. But, then, he had some excellent English blood in his veins—and blood will tell, whatever new-fangled ideas were coming into favor concerning the abolishment of the House of Lords.

"So you think you also will be going to Egypt, Mr. Carlton?" she interrogated, as she had already done a dozen times before. Really, it was high time that Alice was getting settled, and, apart from his nationality, Carlton was rather unobjectionable.

"Oh, yes, indeed, if you'll permit me," Carlton answered heartily. "I haven't been out to Egypt for two years now, and this will give me an added motive. You may not believe me, but I had intended going out, anyway. Matter of some half-baked scientific researches of mine."

Auntie nodded her head approvingly.

"Americans—so Sir Edward Plumton tells me—have been doing some really remarkable excavation in Egypt recently."

"It was another sort of excavation that I intended," said Carlton good-naturedly. "Myths, traditions, magic—things like that. Not very respectable, I fear, but interesting. And then, the last time I was in Cairo I saw any number of mad or half mad beggars—"

"How dreadful!"

"Dreadful, yet interesting—like germs. And there was something that has since turned up that has somehow—"

He had checked himself and fallen into momentary absorption. It is a way that many young men have who are wont to think of the more serious things of the world—even when they have an Alice Wentworth at their side.

They rode back to Paris in comparative silence. Already the season was very late and the fashionable exodus for the south had begun, but there was still plenty to attract their attention, furnish an excuse for no great effort at conversation.

But all the way both Alice Wentworth and George Carlton were conscious, in a way, that both were think-

ing of the same thing—of the same person, perhaps. They were thinking of that odd ghost of his, of that odd aunt of hers. Were they the same? Had it been, as Alice had suggested, a queer case of telepathy, by which her mind had suggested to his, without the intermediary words, a fleeting, disquieting portrait of this other aunt?

Aunt Rhodopis!

The very name again brought up in Carlton's thought some half-forgotten things he had heard on that last trip of his to Egypt. It was concerning these that he had come within an ace of blurting out something a little while ago.

The train of recollection thus started was still uppermost in his mind, a little while later, as, at the door of the hotel, he bade Alice and her aunt good day. He had detained the girl's fingers in his own for a second longer than necessary. Their eyes had met with what must have seemed to both of them as a new understanding.

Then Carlton, unexpectedly even to himself, put the question so softly that none but she could hear. None would have understood the significance of it, even if they had heard.

"Tell me," he asked earnestly, "did you ever hear of the Woman of the Pyramid?"

CHAPTER III.

THE STORY OF HAMID YUSEF.

ONE of the oddest characteristics of the human brain—so that rising young psychologist, George Carlton, had noticed more than once in the course of his life—is its facility as a long-distance jumper.

A friend is about to tell you the *dénouement* of an alluring bit of scandal, or something like that. You are on the tiptoe of interest. You can't wait for the next word. Then some trivial interruption occurs, and the whole thing is left in abeyance for months, possibly for years.

Sometimes, in fact, the mind takes such a terrific jump from a springboard like this that it never comes back at all. Was this to be another case in point?

They had traveled together to the Riviera—Carlton, Miss Wentworth, and her aunt—had embarked at Marseilles on the same ship, had traveled together to Alexandria, and thence to Cairo. And still that question had remained unanswered.

"Tell me, did you ever hear of the Woman of the Pyramid?"

As Carlton sat alone in front of his window at Shepheard's he recalled the question. His asking of it seemed somehow very remote. He recognized it now—he and Alice had not reverted to the subject by some sort of tacit consent.

Why had they never taken up again that curious conversation which had begun in the Bois de Boulogne? Why had she never referred again to her Aunt Rhodopis? Why had he never referred again to that ghost of his? Why had he not repeated his question concerning the Woman of the Pyramid?

Once more there drummed through his brain a jingle that he had heard some place years ago and stored away all unconsciously. Like a soft-footed mental ghost it had been padding up and down the bypaths of his brain almost ever since Alice and her aunt had started up the Nile, leaving him here in Cairo alone.

He wished now that he had gone with them. He was feeling cursedly lonely. He had never felt lonely before in his life—not, at any rate, when he was in a foreign country with a perpetually interesting city around him.

He tried to whistle, tried to reflect, tried to take a mental survey of his circumstances—to tell himself that he was young, healthy, with plenty of money, not too much, but sufficient; and that he was certainly the elect of the finest girl in the two hemispheres.

All this, but through it all there drummed that Satanic refrain:

Fair Rhodopé, as story tells,
The bright, unearthly nymph who dwells
'Mid sunless gold and jewels hid—
The Lady of the Pyramid!

There came a knock at the door, and Carlton was brought back to immediate circumstances with a jolt. He had come up to his room after dinner to get something or other, he hardly remembered what; had been sitting there idly dreaming ever since. He felt as though he had been awakened from a sound sleep.

Faint, yet distinct, there came to him the noises of the night—music and laughter from below-stairs, the shrill, odd pulse of the city.

"Come in—and what is it?"

"It is Osman, sir."

"Hello, Osman," said Carlton. "I sha'n't need you to-night. Go out and enjoy yourself."

"Please, sir," said the servant, "I have found the man you speak about."

Carlton turned with a start of pleased surprise. Osman, dressed in the white *qalabeah* and red *tarboosh* of the Cairo *suffragi*, or personal servant, smiled at him through the semi-darkness.

"Where is he?"

"We find him on the steps of the mosque of Ibn-Tulun," Osman said. "He thinks he's haunted by an Afrit—by an evil spirit. He refuses to leave the mosque."

"But there is only one Afrit that interests me, Osman, and that's the evil spirit of the Red Pyramid."

"Of such he speaks, *monsieur*."

"What's his name?"

"His name is Hamid Yusef."

"Only one eye?"

"Only one eye, so far as I could see through his hair and his rags."

It was about an hour later that Carlton, dressed inconspicuously, a red *tarboosh* like that which Osman wore replacing his ordinary hat, passed through the streets of Old Cairo toward the deserted, ancient mosque of which his servant had spoken. High, gray houses—as ancient as Egypt itself they seemed—looked down upon him sullenly. He felt a little tremor of excitement.

Was it really superstition that had kept Alice Wentworth and himself from reverting to the subject of their conversation in the Bois de Boulogne, he wondered; or was there some deeper reason? Egypt is full of mystery, and always will be.

He and Osman walked in silence until they came to the steps of the mosque of Ibn-Tulun.

At first Carlton had a disappointing impression that no one was there, it was all so dark and deserted; then he heard a crooning voice—the wail of the ancient Mohammedan who asks charity.

"There he is now," whispered Osman.

Rags and gray hair, then a single gleaming point of light in the midst of it which Carlton recognized as an eye—a formless gray shadow in the gray shadows of unlighted stone steps and a blank wall. The shadow again stirred and once more there crooned from it that wailing voice, softer now than before.

"In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, have mercy on Hamid Yusef, who has seen the Woman of the Pyramid!"

Osman was translating glibly, with only a slight accent, with only an occasional French word—a souvenir of some former master of his.

"Tell him," said Carlton, "that there are others among the faithful whom the Prophet has favored with madness; that they also claim to have seen the Woman of the Pyramid."

"There have been many such."

Carlton, standing very erect, looked down at the ancient beggar. There was something so hoary and patriarchal in the rags and beard, that single eye gleaming up at him through the twilight, that it seemed impossible that

this could be the source of a lie—of self-deception, perhaps, of superstition; but not of a lie.

"Tell him I want to hear the story—that I'll give him a piece of gold."

Osman, while a perfectly good gossip, was no great hand at telling a story; yet, even he was unable to lose all of the touches which Hamid Yusef gave to his account.

"Behold, this shriveled form was once young, beautiful, filled with the juices of youth. I was the man Mark Twain spoke about—skipping up and down the pyramids like a goat. The eminent and the beautiful traveled all the way round the world, not to see the pyramids, nor even the mosques, but merely to see Hamid Yusef skip up and down the pyramid.

"Having thus won all the glory in the world, behold there remained yet another feat which beckoned me. We dwellers in the shadows of the pyramids know that not only is the sphinx haunted, but the pyramids themselves, and all the ground whereon they stand.

"There are as many spirits round about there as there are grains of sand in the desert. These have a queen. She is the Woman of the Pyramid.

"Her home is in the Red Pyramid—the third—the one she built, and it was there that I went to see her. Each night of the new moon she appears.

"It was the night of the new moon that I waited. I wore a new *burnoose*. I was washed and perfumed. I had new shoes. There wasn't a lady in Cairo who wouldn't have called me master.

"Then she stood in front of me, quivering—more beautiful than the daughter of the mosque-keeper who opens that little wicket up there every morning and throws me a piece of bread.

"She beckoned. I followed. She was lighter on her feet than the silver of the moon. Hamid Yusef, the admiration of Mark Twain, pursued. Ah, I was scented with all the perfumes of the *hamin*, but she smelt sweeter still, and she was laughing back at me. It was better than a hashish dream. I had my hand out, just touched her veil—"

"Go on—tell him to go on," said Carlton.

"He says he wants money," said Osman. "Says he has a wife and five young children."

Carlton had put his hand into his pocket. He was willing to make a generous contribution. This was certainly what he had come after. This impressed him all the more as he glanced about him, noted again the unlighted steps, the dim, gray walls that must have stood just there for centuries; the abiding presence of the vast, old, deserted mosque of Ibn-Tulun—the oldest in Cairo—the oldest in Africa, perhaps.

His fingers took note of the loose coins in his pocket, searching, weighing, seeking a piece of gold. Then he went rigid, let out a little gasp.

The slender form of a woman had suddenly appeared, there just a few steps above them, was coming in their direction—"as lightly as the silver of the moon."

Now, even while he looked, Carlton weighed all the pros and cons of possible delusion. His mental fingers, like the fingers in his pocket, were searching for the piece of gold—the gold of truth, in this instance. For, even before he could recognize her, he knew who this woman—whether real or spectral—would be.

She passed quite close to him—so close that his heart fluttered at once with embarrassment as well as excitement.

She had looked at him squarely and he had looked at her. In an ordinary woman that look of hers would have been brazen—it was so bold, so full of promise, so confident and frank. Yet, there was that in it which gave him a nameless thrill of fear as well. It was as full of slumberous peril as the stare of a snake.

The eyes were green. They looked at him from under straight, black brows.

He tore away his own attention long enough to glance at Osman and the antique beggar, Hamid Yusef.

Osman hadn't moved, still stood there looking down at the old man. The old man himself had shrunken a little deeper into his rags and beard.

Carlton whirled back to where his eyes had left the woman, looked up, looked down, looked all around.

She had disappeared.

CHAPTER IV.

NIGHT OF THE NEW MOON.

DANCES, dinners, almost daily letters from Alice up the Nile—which he answered with some fervor, as well as with perfect promptness—and all the other ordinary features of the Egyptian season; yet Carlton could not get away from the feeling of mystery that clung close about him. For that matter, he didn't try to. It was in keeping with his mood.

Only in a roundabout way had he questioned Osman about the apparition he had seen on the steps of the mosque of Ibn-Tulun. It must have been an apparition. Like every other member of his race and class, Osman was not the person to let any woman pass unnoticed.

He had flouted the mere possibility of such a thing almost tearfully. No, there had been no woman on the steps of the mosque while they were there—nor anywhere near, unless, perhaps, behind those inscrutable gray walls.

The walls of Old Cairo—of *Vieux Caire*—always look as though they might conceal languishing slaves with painted lips and eyes.

Carlton took note of himself—investigated himself as though he were at once specialist and patient; as, indeed, to some extent, he was. For, on that previous visit of his to Egypt—it had not been made "during the season"—he had traveled far into the desert with some friends of his on a mission from Harvard, and had managed to be touched by the sun.

Carlton's own valuable monograph on sunstroke can be consulted in most of the scientific libraries of the world to-day.

But what interested him now was the fact that many of the subsequent effects of the sunstroke seemed to be returning to him now—the same occasional lapses of memory, the same prevalence of reverie or day-dream, the same brooding sense of mystery, the same premonitions of forthcoming events. Whether these events concerned the actual, visible world, or merely the world of his imagination, was of no great concern. That an adventure was impending he felt certain—increasingly certain.

He had always nourished the belief that atmosphere and locality had much to do with the phenomena of the world; had always believed that things which were possible in one country, for example, were impossible elsewhere.

With him from America he had brought a bunch of keys—each key, doubtless, of perfectly good steel. Now they were rusty, every one of them. Yet native steel, as there was abundant evidence all about him, did not rust at all.

Wasn't the same thing possible, in a different degree, with the infinitely more delicate and responsive substance of the human mind? He had known Indian jugglers who had been utterly incapable of performing their commonest tricks—or miracles—outside of their own country.

Wasn't it just possible that their minds had rusted in the new environment, just as these American keys of his had rusted in the air of Egypt?

More than that. Wasn't it possible that his own mind was reacting to the million mysterious currents of this ancient land, where other minds, no stronger than his, only different, responded not at all?

One of the resident physicians at Shepheard's, Dr. Blake—an old friend of his—met him in the hall one day.

"A trifle liverish," Dr. Blake diagnosed. "Come into my office and have a pill."

Carlton laughed.

"I'm treating my own case."

The incident ended there, so far as Dr. Blake was concerned. Some idle, friendly talk and they had gone their several ways. But the physician's remark lingered in Carlton's thought. He was feeling queer, and no mistake. What his friend had said accentuated the fact. What was this thing that was hanging over him?

Since his interview with Hamid Yusef, he had prodded deeper into that myth of the Woman of the Pyramid. He had talked long with another half-crazed beggar he had found near the old Coptic church—had heard practically the same story. He had found others, and still others. Cairo seemed to be filled with crazy men who attributed their downfall—or their good fortune, seeing that all such are under the special protection of the Prophet—to that same haunting spirit of the Pyramid of Menkaura.

He had discovered the same tradition in the only translation he could find of the Arab historian, al-Murtadi.

It was all right for the other strangers within the gates of this ancient land — tourists, Turkish, English, and French officialdom, greedy Levantines of every stripe—it was all right for such to laugh at the old tradition. But he had facts of his own. Real facts they were, too, however odd, however unscientific.

In the first place there was not only the appearance of Alice's Aunt Rhodopis. There was the name Rhodopis itself—a name constantly recurring in everything that he could find concerning the Red Pyramid—the third and smallest of the eternal Three, and yet the most fascinating.

They called it the Pyramid of Menkaura, but a woman had built it—had built it away back in the dawn of time—Queen Netokris or the fabulous courtesan Rhodopis—who could tell?

And Carlton had seen her again—had once more looked upon that private, haunting, beautiful, yet terrible specter of his. This time, as on that day in the Bois de Boulogne, looked upon her in the full flood of daylight with plenty of other people there also to see, had they cared or been able.

It was the hour of afternoon tea—the great rooms of Shepheard's crowded by the rich and the fashionable and the otherwise celebrated from the six continents. A blaze of color—anything lacking in that respect being supplied by the servants in red and white.

Carlton, seated by himself, only dimly conscious of the music and the frothy surge of laughter and conversation, of tinkling silver, glass, and porcelain.

Then, there she stood again.

This time he looked his fill.

She stood at the far end of the room, slender, graceful, exquisitely dressed—though this latter fact was a mere impression, Carlton, like many men, being quite incapable of ever noting the detail of feminine costume. She looked back at him quite as steadily.

She had an olive complexion: red lips, painted, perhaps, but not too much; blue-black hair: and then, those singular disquieting eyes, dark-fringed, yet light, under fine, straight black brows that did not curve at all except where they drooped a little at the temples.

He looked and looked. So did she. There was no feeling of embarrassment on his part this time. There was romance in it, unquestionably; but, so far as he was concerned, there was something more than romance. There was the passion for truth which fires every scientist, especially if he be something of an idealist, if he have a touch of the poet in him.

> The bright unearthly nymph who dwells
> 'Mid sunless gold and jewels hid.

Was it possible that he was to be permitted to solve the old, old riddle that

al-Murtadi had spoken about? Was this the Woman of the Pyramid?

He smiled at her, and she smiled back. Steadily, as steadily as though he had a full glass of water in his hand which he didn't want to spill, Carlton got up from his chair and started forward, his eyes still on the enchantress, real or imaginary—whatever she was.

While this had been in progress an extremely fat and bald-headed gentleman, accompanied by two extraordinarily slim and hirsute young women, had been making his way down the center of the crowded room. With a polite nod he moved toward the table which Carlton had just vacated, blocking Carlton's view for a moment.

When Carlton could look again the woman was gone.

That same evening, obedient to some instinct which led him as surely as the homing instinct directs a pigeon to its destination, Carlton found himself on the long road that leads from the suburbs of Cairo to the pyramids.

They reared their mountainous silhouettes — the imperishable Three, as mighty and mysterious as Egypt is in the history of mankind — shimmering gold and purple against the western sky.

The pyramids!

The sun went down. Night crept in upon him like an ancient spell. Still the pyramids hung nebulous in front of him—as real and as unreal as a figment of his imagination. What was reality and unreality, anyway?

Were these mysterious mountains of hewn stone any more real or any less real than the other legacies handed down to man from the remote past—the legacy of memories and experiences which every man, however poor, carries round in the back of his head?

The lebbek-trees were black—blacker than they had ever appeared before. The entire landscape had taken on a magical aspect, holy, solemn, brooding.

There was no sound. Carlton had a peculiar sensation of being all alone in the world — of having passed into a sort of cosmic anteroom—the ordinary world behind him, the palace of the unknown just ahead, yet unexplored.

Then it was as though a servant had appeared from the palace and bade him enter. Every nerve in his body was crisping.

He stood there looking into the young night-sky, hypnotized by the dim and slender crescent that he saw there.

It was the night of the new moon.

CHAPTER V.

INTO THE DARK.

It may be said with perfect confidence that everything depends on a man's personality, on his temperament, anyway. The Society for Psychical Research, both in England and in America, has paid a good deal of attention to this phase of a man. The majority of people never see a ghost, never have even a ghostly feeling, except a sort of "creepiness," perhaps, when something or other occurs that they do not immediately understand.

Yet, over against this truth is the other—that the annals of the world, both written and unwritten, in every language, from every country and every century, are filled with ghost stories.

Not only that, but the learned society mentioned above has investigated no end of such stories in a purely scientific spirit and has found them to be true.

It results that what are vulgarly called ghosts are real, and that, while the vast majority of the earth's population can't see them, there are others who can; and that there always have been such.

This, to some extent, is merely a reflection of what was passing through George Carlton's mind as he stood there on the edge of the desert, the pyramids soaring into the mystic, shadowy air to one side of him, that other vast shadow of the sphinx—he could understand why the Arabs called

it "the Father of Terrors"—beyond; that timorous, slender new moon, "like a frightened girl," floating in the sky above him.

It had always been the same — for Hamid Yusef on the steps of the mosque, for the old beggar outside the Coptic church, and every other loose madman that Osman had ferreted out for him: it had always been the same —on the night of the new moon they had seen her and followed the Woman of the Pyramid.

Carlton laughed.

"Shall I risk madness, too?"

His only answer was to walk forward, to surrender himself completely to the spell of the hour and the place.

He was not much of an Egyptologist, but he was fairly familiar with the ordinary aspects of the pyramids, of the sphinx, and their surrounding geography.

Over there, in ancient times, lay Memphis, and this had been the City of the Dead. It still was, after the lapse of all these centuries. No wonder that the Arabs preferred to give the place a wide berth at night!

What spells of magic, black and white, had not been woven into the winding-sheets of the thousands of dead who had been buried here? He, for one, would never deny that the priests of this ancestor of nations were masters of magic of every kind.

The sphinx! Even in that dim light he could see on its scarred visage the awe of the man who looks upon eternity. Who else but a master-magician, a demigod, could have dreamed such a dream as this monument and then have had it executed! It was old, most likely, when even the pyramids were young; and they—

Cheops, Chefren, Menkaura!

To think that there were men who, in the name of science, would have these considered as mere burial places!

For Carlton, as for so many others, they epitomized the human race — its knowledge, so much of which had been lost; its aspirations, the same now as they had always been; its dim, unknowable origin, its unknowable end.

He remembered the first time that he had ever entered one of these man-made mountains—the warm darkness as he followed the twinkling candle of his guide deeper and deeper under the million tons of stone.

He had felt then, as he felt now, like the initiate of the ancient Mysteries. For, until any man has followed some twinkling light to the very heart of material appearance, what can he possibly know of life or of death or of the Giver of these things?

But it was the Pyramid of Menkaura —the Red Pyramid, the least but most beautiful of the three great ones—that drew Carlton now. And he was ready to admit to himself that there was something more than mere moralizing in his heart as he drew near to it. He felt almost as though he knew it—as though it were expecting him.

The Pyramid of Queen Netokris, of the "Ruddy-Faced" Rhodopis! The Pyramid of the Woman!

There is an entrance to this pyramid — well known to tourists — on the northern side. From this, a long, narrow tunnel slants down to the chamber, far below the pyramid-floor and almost under the apex.

This entrance became Carlton's destination at first. He admitted it, half amusedly, half ashamed. He, George Carlton, man of science, almost thirty, prowling alone at night in the neighborhood of the pyramids in the quest of a ghost!

But no man's mood, unless he was a good deal of a downright idiot, could be anything but solemn for any length of time in this august company. By the time that Carlton had come to the rough foot of the Third Pyramid, had paused once to glance up its sloping height—reaching, like Jacob's ladder, to the very stars—he was again submerged in queer, half-formed broodings.

The night fell deeper. It was almost as though he were a diver in a blue,

ethereal sea—going deeper and deeper, ever deeper into hitherto fathomless depths.

Had the hands of the dial of eternity been turned back it would be like this. The pyramids knew no age. Neither did Harmachis, the great sphinx, who still guarded the cemetery of Memphis.

There is a quality of the desert night which writers and travelers have often mentioned. It is the quality which nature often possesses — of making a man feel himself be but the smallest grain of dust, the merest microbe. Add to this the huge, mystical mass of the pyramids, and you will have the feeling that engulfed Carlton as he waited there — waited, he wouldn't have said for what.

Blue night, blue shadows, each great star a golden lamp, that frightened girl of a new moon gone long ago! He, the only atom of human consciousness in time or space, seated on a stone of Menkaura's pyramid—that one stone as old as the earth and as solid!

He had been seated there for he couldn't say how long. He had passed on by when he came to the entrance on the north side of the pyramid; had passed on round to the west where he knew that, for half the distance round the world, there was, perhaps, no other human being—empty desert and empty sea and empty sky. Then he was conscious that another presence was drawing near.

He did not stir, did not move his eyes even from their contemplation of the sky. But there had come a slight creeping of his superficial nerves, a sensation of nameless expectancy.

While he sat there, as he always said afterward, he experienced a swift review of everything which had led up to this supreme moment—the first time that he had ever seen that particular ghost of his back in the Savoy while the orchestra was playing; again, in Munich, with the strains of *Aïda* in the air; again, in the Bois de Boulogne, on the steps of the mosque, in the crowded room at Shepheard's; the prescience that this *was* the Woman of the Pyramid; and, more than all else, that she was here now, just behind him, looking at him, waiting for him to turn!

He turned.

He saw her standing there, only a few paces away. Perhaps it was that wonderful blue light of the desert night which cast a spell over his senses. At any rate, she appeared more beautiful and alluring than whenever he had seen her before.

There was a gust of tepid air, and it brought to him such perfume as he had never even dreamed of before; then a tingling of witch-music—as though the spirits of all the musicians he had ever heard and loved had cast their very best into a few bars and a few chords.

She smiled at him. He found himself scrambling to his feet—and a feeling scrambling to its feet in his heart such as he had hardly known existed there, even on that first night when he had first kissed Alice.

His nerves were still crisping. It was a good deal like that time that he had smoked a hashish cigarette.

> A little while before (wrote Carlton, in the second and last monograph he has ever published), I was fully aware that man, in the presence of infinity, is himself infinity—the infinitely small in the presence of the infinitely great.
>
> Matter, of course, is never at rest. The molecules of the brick swing free in their eternal dance. Was I not but a sentient molecule swinging free in the material universe as I followed the Woman into the Pyramid?

Carlton felt a pair of vibrant arms under his head, felt a perfumed, tepid breath on his face, looked up into the glowing eyes of the woman who had been haunting him.

CHAPTER VI.

THROUGH GHOSTLY CORRIDORS.

He knew that they had not entered the Pyramid of Menkaura by the pass-

ageway used by tourists to-day. In that monograph of his there is a rough sketch which indicates, so far as possible, the route which he and "the woman" had followed—a succession of ghostly corridors, concerning which there is to-day no other record. Nothing will ever be done about it, most likely. The indications — Carlton admits it frankly enough—leave much to be desired.

Neither geometry nor geography were uppermost in his mind at the time, as you may readily imagine.

It was, indeed, to some extent as though he were but another molecule passing through intermolecular space. Yet there was nothing unnatural about it.

It wasn't the first time that he had been into the pyramid. There was the same impression of warm darkness, of silent, stirless air. He is quite sure that "the Woman" carried no light. Such light as there was seemed to be diffused, just sufficient to discover the massive stone walls and roofs and floor.

Corridor after corridor, narrow and long! Once or twice they had paused in front of a monolith which blocked the passage, had seen it silently displaced to let them pass.

Then a rock-chamber not much more than ten feet square — a cruciform couch in the center of it covered with lion-skins, the walls richly frescoed with figures which even he knew were explanatory of Ethiopian magic.

"I know that others have gone mad through having looked at you," said Carlton. "Is that what has happened to me?"

"You are here because I wished it," she said.

He sought to disengage her arms from about his neck, had a panicky sensation that the thing was wrong, even if it were nothing but an obsession. She merely held him tighter, while he saw appear in her face a glint of cruelty as well as of immense yearning.

"Tell me that you love me," she said.

The words, while spoken very softly, had as much of anger as there was of pleading in them.

Said Carlton: "I do, but I'm pledged to Alice."

"Alice—you mean Berenice."

"I've always called her Alice," Carlton answered, still struggling.

"Berenice!"

There was such contempt and hatred in the inflexion that Carlton leaped to the defense—mentally, that is.

"As you will," he whispered; "but I am bound to her."

"Love me, anyway," came the answer in a voice that was softer and more savage still.

She was leaning over him. Her face lent itself to savagery—green eyes, straight, black brows, red lips that could be cruel and smiling all at the same time. How different she was from that other one—the girl with the fair skin, violet eyes, apricot hair.

But what was that riddle of the names—Alice or Berenice, Berenice or Alice? The strange name seemed somehow familiar, was stirring up a whole lake of latent memory. A moment, and he was asking himself not where the name Berenice came from, but how he had happened to refer to her as Alice at all.

Then he noticed something else that increased his dismay—baffled him, brought the hot blood surging once more to his face in an unmistakable blush. His enchantress had drawn back slightly, and he saw that his first impression of her was correct—she was attired in the scant, disquieting dress of ancient Egypt. With a calamitous lurch, he knew that it was the same with him—the old, familiar sensation that he had theretofore known only in dreams, the sensation of finding himself in a crowded ballroom half-clothed.

Instantly he was making a wild effort to recover himself, to achieve the truth, to wake himself up.

"Tell me," he faltered, "what has happened. You are Rhodopis—"

"You dare to speak like that to the Isis?"

He noticed that there was not so much of anger in the question as there was of amazement.

"Are you, indeed, crazed, as you suggested a little while ago?"

Before he could answer she had kissed him.

"Wake me up—I want to wake up," said Carlton. "I have seen the Woman of the Pyramid—know all that I want to know. I'll make a report on the facts—interesting stuff for the Society for Psychical Research—"

Said the woman: "My governor is out of his head. Poor Menni is, indeed, mad."

Carlton was sitting up, heart thumping, head hot.

"Menni—Isis—Berenice! I'm not mad. I'm under a temporary spell, perhaps."

Even while he was saying this he was perfectly conscious that he was somehow making a fool of himself. But he persisted — hopelessly, yet knowing that therein lay his only hope.

"Who are you?" he demanded thickly. "And who am I?"

He put the questions doggedly. The painted stone all round him, that cruciform couch covered with lion-skins, he himself in the scant attire of another age, then this demonesque, beautiful, terrible apparition just in front of him!

She had again drawn back slightly, was looking at him now with a shade of fearful amusement, yet yearning still.

"I am your queen, Netokris, who loves you. You are Menni, governor of the Double Palace. Calm yourself. Just now you called me Rhodopis. I know that you would not apply to me that name of reproach if you were in your proper senses. But I would be even Rhodopis for you. Call me your courtesan if you will. That is why I brought you here. There now—there—"

She had again drawn near to him—nearer, for she at no time had been far away, couldn't have been, even had she wished, the room was so small.

Over Carlton's senses there again swept like a silken pall that gulf of delicate, intoxicating perfume.

There was a ringing in his ears which gradually became the faint, clear music of an elfin orchestra. He did not resist now as he felt that pair of vibrant, bare arms again encircling his head.

His brain was still doing its best to recover old realities, to shake off the sense of delusion—a delusion which itself was instantly becoming more and more real.

The words came back to him: "*I am your queen, Netokris, who loves you. You are Menni, governor of the Double Palace.*"

It was this that troubled him—that the statement appeared increasingly reasonable and true—that he was not George Carlton—that there could be no such person—but that he was Menni himself, no less.

"And you will love me," came the tremulous whisper.

This time he answered: "But I am bound to Berenice."

"Love me, anyway," the woman answered, "or I'll kill you both."

CHAPTER VII.

BACK, FIVE THOUSAND YEARS.

CARLTON felt that there was no need for haste. His first sense of panic had disappeared by this time. In its place had come a feeling of wonder comparatively reflective and calm.

He was intensely alert to his physical sensations and his physical surroundings. This was lion-skin on which he reclined. Beneath it was the unmistakable feel of solid rock.

"This is an inner chamber of the pyramid," he said softly.

"Yes, my own."

"And you are Queen Netokris?"

"Most certainly, my dove."

"And just now you called me Menni."

"Yea, yea. Ah, let us talk of other things. When will the governor become the Osiris—sit with me on the Double Throne?"

Carlton's mind may have still been struggling, probably was. But it was like a swimmer who has sunk in deep water, has lost the power or the will to return again to the surface, who finds himself at home in the new element.

This was reality. All that had been was the dream.

Gently, but firmly, he freed himself, stood up, looked about.

"It is time that we were going," he said gravely, dispassionately. "Come!"

He scarcely dared look at the other, feeling that there was danger of another outbreak, that—"Love me, anyway, or I'll kill you both!"

He was conscious of the mantle of dignity he had put on. He was glancing about him with a certain air of appreciation and comprehension at this place where he knew he had never been before—admired the workmanship of the closely joined rock, the draftsmanship of the richly colored frescoes.

All the time he could feel the eyes of the woman upon him—knew that they were filled with wonder, also; wonder and baffled passion.

Netokris!

Where had he got the impression that she had lived five thousand years ago? Who was it that had referred to her as Aunt Rhodopis? He smiled inwardly now, in spite of his trepidation, at his having just now himself referred to her as Rhodopis.

Bold he must have been, indeed, to apply to his queen the name of the legendary Greek sorceress. That the epithet was just, even the most unscrupulous gossips of the time would barely whisper.

One of the painted blocks of stone swung upward in response to hidden mechanism, left a yawning portal through which they passed into a tenebrous passageway—probably the one by which they had entered. They followed this for a while, their sandaled feet giving out but a faint whisper from the smooth rock. That same soft, diffused light which seemed to emanate from the woman who preceded him. Then another monolithic door.

This time they had left the silence behind them. Through the still air of the passageway there floated to them a faint, confused murmur of sound—voices that might have been reciting a litany, the cadence of a solemn chant, a barely perceptible ebb and flow of lesser noises which doubtless came from the outer world.

Presently they had entered a room a good deal larger than the first, and Carlton caught a movement of shadowy shapes, of men, young and old, scantily dressed in rich raiment—these he knew to be princes and courtiers—and of other men with shaven heads and dressed in spotless linen, some of them with leopard-skins hanging over their shoulders—and these he knew to be priests.

Once more he had taken note of his own costume: but it was not with the air of a man who is ashamed or surprised. He found it all right—that sort of long kilt that descended almost from armpits to ankles, an embroidered tunic which covered his shoulders but left his two arms free.

Physically, he was feeling immensely fit and comfortable, albeit slightly tired. But in his breast there was an unmistakable sense of depression—the feeling of one who has just recognized the first incident in some drama vitally concerning himself and those he loves.

He heard himself addressed as "Menni," and again as "my lord-governor," and knew that this was as it should be. He knew also that his bearing was at once simple and dignified.

Still, through it all, like the shred

of an all but forgotten dream, there ran the dim, receding recollection that he was not Menni at all, but a man named Carlton. No, that he had once been Carlton—doubtless in a dream; it couldn't be otherwise—and that he was Menni now—Menni, governor of the Double Palace which lay over there beyond the sacred lake—the City of the White Wall, in Memphis.

He tested himself, even while he was responding to the salutations of the others there—tested himself for knowledge of himself, his duties, his place in the world, the details of his environment. He called up a quick vision of the Double Palace, of the royal city surrounded with its "white wall" in the midst of the great capital of the Egyptian Empire, historic Memphis!

That something had happened to him he was perfectly aware. He was feeling just a trifle queer—perhaps the effect of an old sunstroke which he had suffered a couple of years previously.

Otherwise, he told himself, he wouldn't have this haunting subconsciousness of a blurred personality. But he had often talked with the priests—they being the only ones interested in erudition, anyway—about the phenomena of the human brain.

There were even those among them who had studied the mental processes of the "possessed," who had attempted to penetrate the vagaries of the insane. Even the sanest of mortals—Menni, the governor of the Double Palace, was fully aware—even the sanest of mortals were touched with glamor, with "possession," at times; dreamed awake, and things like that.

And in the depths of these meditations, even while he talked, was the growing conviction that his queen, Netokris, the Isis, had cast some sort of a spell over him. She was a woman of magic powers—every one knew that; had in her command not only the sorcery of Egypt, but the thaumaturgics of the Far South as well.

There was another moment when, in the eery light of the place, he felt the burning eyes of the queen upon him.

He gave no sign. He had never been a courtier, anyway; was determined to stick to his duty and let the rest take care of itself. He started for the open air.

CHAPTER VIII.

"ISIS ON EARTH."

THE pyramids pink in the morning light, just as they always are, to this day; but one of them ruddier than the others—the smallest and most beautiful of the three mighty ones, for it is sheathed in polished red granite from its pointed apex down to the mighty platform on which it stands.

Ruddier also is the face of the sphinx, of mighty Harmachis, which guards the necropolis of Memphis, for the same queen who sheathed the pyramid of Menkaura in red granite has likewise caused the face of Harmachis to be painted her favorite color.

Which is only natural, for she herself is the "ruddy-faced," and, according to every prince and courtier who gets a chance to whisper the fact, the fairest creature in the length and breadth of Egypt—of the world.

"*Netokris, who united the two countries, Queen of the Diadem of the Vulture and the Snake, of abiding splendor, the golden Horus in woman's form, soul of gods, Queen of Upper Egypt and Queen of Lower Egypt, Isis of splendid life, daughter of Isis, Netokris!*"

As the heralds took their places to the left and the right of the entrance to the Red Pyramid, and shouted the titles of her who was about to appear, other mourners in other parts of the necropolis came forward, some of them on the run.

The chance was too good to be lost. There had been a good deal of talk about the queen, even before her hus-

band died. There had been more since.

A wonderful woman, even if it hadn't been for the recent tragedy in her life which had left her alone on the Double Throne—young, fairly good-looking, passionate, yet marvelously well versed in the wisdom of the priests.

A widow, mistress of the world!

No wonder that she was being courted by every eligible prince in the empire! More than one woman was thinking of that as she hurried along the granite pavements of the city of the dead toward the door of the Red Pyramid whence Netokris was about to appear. Had she really been there mourning her husband, they wondered, or had she been casting spells to find out who the dead king's successor should be?

Heralds lined up to the left and right. A crowd of half-naked mercenaries with long staffs to keep the crowds back and to clear the way. A group of noblemen in sleeveless tunics of transparent linen. A gold and ivory litter covered with lion-skins, a dozen Nubians standing near to carry it.

The Nubians don't know that the princes have agreed among themselves to seize the litter, as if in response to spontaneous impulse, and carry her majesty back to the palace as a token that they themselves are her slaves. There isn't a man in the group who wouldn't give his right hand to be picked out as the queen's favorite.

The crowd was constantly becoming larger. Netokris always did like to keep people waiting.

"Been praying all night," whispered a middle-aged citizen from Memphis.

He was rich enough, as you could tell by his gold collar, albeit he wore little else than sandals and a thin linen skirt.

The woman at his side, dressed almost exactly the same, except that her hair was longer, done up in crinkly plaits and dyed blue, sneered up into her husband's face.

"Praying!"

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"You think evil, even of the gods," he retorted, then strained his eyes again in the direction of the pyramid door.

There wasn't a man in Memphis who wouldn't rather see the queen than his own wife, almost.

There appeared from the interior of the colossal temple a band of priests, their heads completely shaven, leopard-skins draped over their bare shoulders, indicating that they had been at their duties all night.

Another interval and a young man followed—all alone, very straight, his smooth face pale.

"Menni, the new governor of the palace," some one whispered in the crowd.

The name was taken up and repeated.

"Did you notice," one of the princes whispered, "how troubled he looks? The Isis must be displeased with him. I'm glad of it."

"So am I," hissed the other. "I'm not wishing him anything evil, but if he'd only step on an asp—"

Menni did look anything but cheerful, it must be confessed. What cursed luck had brought him out to the pyramid last night! He knew that the queen would be there. That was the hideous folly of it.

Had he remained in the city he would have evaded this perilous crisis, perhaps indefinitely.

Whence had come that impulse?

Then he knew. The Isis had been designing his entanglement for some time past. It filled him with mortification, but he admitted it. He had guessed the truth long ago from the way that she had looked at him out of those green eyes of hers.

He had felt it more than ever yesterday afternoon when she had looked at him again across a crowded room of the palace, had smiled at him that haunting, disquieting smile of provocation. And yet, in spite of it all, he had

gone out to the pyramid at night, he hardly knew why—the night of the new moon, which is always dangerous to those who would avoid dangerous sorcery.

He recalled how the queen had found him sitting at the side of the pyramid staring out across the desert—blue darkness everywhere, save for the golden lamps of the stars; he all alone in the universe. And then, she!

Netokris!

She had smiled at him, had lulled his senses with her uncanny powers. None but a witch, even if she were the Isis on earth, would use a perfume like that.

Great Ammon! Great Ptah!

Why hadn't he accepted the invitation to go along on that trip up the Nile? But at thought of Berenice there again crept into his mind the dim, faintly heard echo of that other name—Alice! And this other dream of his—phantasmagoria which returned to him there in the midst of the familiar sights and sounds around him like the shadows of another civilization—people oddly clad "all over," of mammoth boats with fire in them, of curiously frail houses, of waving banners such as he had never seen before in any dream!

Menni passed on down through the waiting crowd of slaves, attendants, and courtiers, speaking a word here, giving a direction there—a man of power, a favorite of the queen, according to all reports, but obviously distraught and heavy-laden.

"He has been watching all night," said the citizen of Memphis in the abbreviated skirt.

"Yes, he has," said his wife, the lady with the blue hair, with a fine inflection of irony. She laughed scornfully, but she likewise was on tiptoes by this time.

A cheer went up that drowned what the heralds had started to chant—"*Netokris, who united the two countries, Queen of the Diadem of the Vulture and the Snake, of abiding splendor, the golden Horus in—*"

About the door of the pyramid there was a swirl of movement—long-handled fans of ostrich feathers going up, a swaying of bodies as slaves, attendants and courtiers alike bowed low. Not a person in the group of all those near the royal presence who did not wilt with body and soul except that young governor of the palace with the thoughtful face. More than one prince—if not the others—noticed how stiff-necked he was and secretly rejoiced.

They would have been willing to wager good money that before very long Menni would indeed be stepping on that poisoned asp.

She stood there for a moment or two, perfectly conscious of all the eyes upon her and thoroughly enjoying it.

Netokris!

She couldn't have been more than twenty-five or so—slender, as graceful as a palm, a wonderful vision in silver and old rose. For she wore a silver skirt—as fine and transparent as though it had been woven of spider-web—embroidered with old-rose flowers; this and little else.

But she had managed to carry out the color-scheme with all the arts ever known to woman, then or since. Her face and her body had been lightly powdered, apparently, with crushed pearl. Toes and finger-tips and lips had all been stained with henna. Her eyes, naturally hypnotic and beautiful, had been penciled across her temples.

And odd and unforgetable and moving presence surely.

He wasn't the only one who did it, but the citizen from Memphis let out a little gurgling gasp at sight of her.

"You're like all the rest," his wife gibed bitterly.

He didn't even hear her.

Netokris, with perfect composure, had gone forward to her litter, swooned gracefully down upon the piled-up lion-skins, and a moment later the giant Nubians, who were her bearers, had swept her shoulder high.

There were those in that foolish little conspiracy—to seize upon the litter

of the queen—who had seen from the first that such a compliment could not be delivered at the present time without a good deal of risk. They had seen her majesty look like that before—just as smiling, just as pleasant, and yet had sensed the sudden death that lurked about her.

But among those who hadn't noticed anything untoward in this was a young prince recently arrived at the court from Upper Egypt.

Impulsively he had sprung forward, seized the bar of the litter nearest to him, stood there for a second or two dazed by his own hardihood, recognizing too late that the others had not acted with him. For a moment he gazed up into the basilisk, painted eyes he adored.

Netokris let her eyes shift to a captain of the guard just back of him—a tall Assyrian — a huge fellow with a black beard and black, bold eyes, his shining yellow shoulders rippling in the young sunlight. She made a quick, slight movement with one of her painted fingers.

There was a flash of polished bronze and the young prince went down shuddering with a crushed skull, blood spattering the pavement.

The crowd—slaves, princes, citizens from Memphis, men and women, let out a loyal, exultant cheer — all except Menni, the governor of the palace—all cheered wildly.

"Netokris! Netokris! Soul of the gods! Isis on earth!"

CHAPTER IX.

PLOTS AND COUNTERPLOTS.

HAD the wide world been searched for the purpose a more striking contrast could not have been found—Netokris—refreshed, but still languorous after her bath and breakfast—and the creature who squatted on the floor there in front of her.

He was jet black, short and broad, had a huge and hideous head, made to appear still larger by the crinkly mane of black outstanding wool. The blackness of his skin was accentuated by the white sheet he had drawn about him.

No one else was there. No one was visible in the garden below. The palace—a city of detached buildings in itself—was almost completely silent save for the all but inaudible splash of fountains, the occasional trill of imported birds, the barking of tame baboons, the snarling complaint of caged animals. The myriad sounds of Memphis, even, busy about its daily tasks, scarcely reached them save as an intermittent croon when nearer sounds were lulled.

Still early morning, but the air was warm—warm and fragrant.

The black squinted up at his mistress with the bright, unabashed eyes of an animal.

"You've killed," he grunted. "I smell blood."

Netokris, from her divan, looked down at him unwinkingly, unsmilingly.

"You tell me what is already old, Kashta."

"You killed young Ambos, he from the Province of the Fox," Kashta went on unperturbed, as though speaking to himself.

"Well, what of it?" the queen went on. "You've told me that I am to kill them all."

"All those who took part in the murder of Metemsa; but Ambos was not of these."

"He was ready enough to take Metemsa's place," sneered Netokris. "You should have seen the light in his eyes as he put his hand on my litter. By Typhon! Can't you bring that sort of a look, Kashta, into the eyes of Menni, the governor?"

An added glitter came into the eyes of the black.

"You'd better let Menni alone," he advised.

"What do you mean?"

Kashta returned the stare of Queen Netokris. It was easy to see that his position was an extraordinary one. Not

another man in Egypt would have dared to look at her—not only a queen, but a goddess, Isis on earth—like that!

"You came into my hands a nameless orphan," he said steadily. "False prophets and counterfeit magicians occasionally rise to the top here in Egypt, but in Ethiopia—the ancient Meroe—not there. Bless the day I took you in and began your education!

"Do you remember the day I sent you out to the banks of the Nile with the spell which would bring the Pharaoh, Metemsa, to your feet? Who else could have brought the nameless orphan up to the level of gods and goddesses?

"Metemsa killed by the jealous princes, you reign. We plan for them an early death to make your place solid. Your beauty, my wisdom—and you rule the world; yet you prate about a look in this fellow's eyes as though you were a fig-seller!"

Netokris looked long and steadily at Kashta. And Kashta looked back. It was he who again broke the silence.

"Oh, no you won't, my daughter," he said. "You won't kill Kashta."

Ordinarily the queen would have been asleep by this time. She preferred to sleep through the hot and drowsy day, reserving the nights for her pleasures, her meditations, and her magic. An extraordinary woman!

She admitted freely enough all that Kashta had said concerning the dominant part that he had thus far taken in her career; but, ever since her divine husband Metemsa was murdered, she had felt that in some way she had emerged from her old bondage.

Was she not, after all, Isis on earth, soul of the gods? There was other magic than that which Kashta had taught her—the younger, more highly evolved magic of the country she had come to rule. Why shouldn't she have not only power, but love as well? What would it profit her to rule the world if she couldn't rule the heart of the one man in it she desired?

For a long time after the black priest of Ethiopia had left her she paced the floor of her bedroom.

Rather an open porch than a room—marble floor covered with thick rugs, a wide, striped awning on the open side, so rigged as to catch every breeze that stirred across the gardens.

With Menni at her side on the double throne, all their rivals safe in the tombs of their ancestors—that would be empire indeed! They would live as gods.

Netokris threw herself on her couch, tried to sleep; but the moment her eyes were closed she was once more living through the events of the night. At first, as she thought of how she had offered herself to this youth in the room under the pyramid, she was filled with anger and shame.

If she could only kill him, as she had brought down sudden death on young Ambos! But she knew that happiness lay not in this direction. That would be the last resource—a poor resource at the best, revenge instead of love.

She could at least kill Berenice—this yellow-haired slave to whom Menni thought he was bound. And then—

The thought, while it brought her a measure of consolation, merely increased the fever that was burning in her heart and brain.

Suddenly she sat upright, reflected a moment or two, then went over to an inlaid chest in one corner of the apartment and drew from it a blue scarf. This she threw about her head and shoulders. No disguise, but sufficient to warn all who encountered her that she was not to be seen.

She passed rapidly through an adjoining room where a score of women were lounging about—silent, some of them asleep in the tepid, perfumed air. A start or two, but beyond that none paid attention. It was dangerous to show attention when her majesty had put on the insignia of invisibility.

It was as though her invisibility was no mere fiction as she passed through the room beyond where members of

the guard were on watch—foreigners, all of them. Potentates have always preferred foreigners for a body-guard, and Netokris—or Kashta, at any rate—was no exception.

She descended a flight of stone stairs and crossed the deserted garden over which her bedroom looked and passed into a wing of the largest building inside the palace walls—a huge structure surrounded by a double row of lotus pillars painted red and green and gold, the Temple of Ptah.

Overhead was the fleckless blue sky. Round about was the dark-green shrubbery. The painted peristyle made a magical contrast.

Guards everywhere—black and brown for the most part, but here and there a group of fair-haired slaves from Macedonia. It was from Macedonia that her governor had come, most likely, for he also was fair-haired and gray-eyed, albeit he had been reared in a princely house of the lower kingdom.

Netokris had passed a dozen groups of guards, had descended two flights of stairs and entered a low stone corridor lined with statues of the gods. Before one of these statues—apparently a part of the wall itself—she paused and gave it a quick, caressing movement of her hand. The statue swung out from the wall, revealing a narrow door. As Netokris entered the statue swung back into place again, leaving no trace of where she had passed.

She found herself in a low chamber almost completely dark. What light there was came up from a small square opening in the floor, a few yards away.

Hastily, as though impatient to see what she had come to see, she ran forward toward this opening, knelt there and peered down.

CHAPTER X.

THE UNDERGROUND PALACE.

MENNI, governor of the Royal Palace, still distraught, still more or less sick at heart, despite his well-known courage and resourcefulness, had accompanied the royal party back from the pyramid and, as usual when feeling like that, resolved to find comfort in work. There was plenty to do. Not since the days of the "great ones of Abydos," the founders of the empire, had the activities of "the one who lives at Memphis" achieved such a scale of magnificence.

The double palace of the double throne—symbolizing the upper and the lower kingdoms—had become a far-flung park in the very midst of the great city. It was a city within a city—a government within a government over which he ruled absolutely, under the life-giving radiance of the sun-queen.

In spite of the internal jealousies and treason which had led to the assassination of young Metemsa—a state of affairs which still continued, and would continue to last, no doubt, until the conspirators were put out of the way or otherwise pacified—the country was enjoying remarkable prosperity. Good crops at home, successful campaigns abroad. Grain, gold, spices, slaves pouring in.

Any one would have a hard time to convince the shopkeepers of Memphis that all this was not due to the rule of a virtuous queen.

It was this period of prosperity which had caused Metemsa to begin one of the most notable works of his reign. This was the great underground treasure-house. It was to be another wonder of the world. A pity, indeed, that the poor fellow didn't live to see its completion.

Down deep under the temple of Ptah, there in the midst of the "City of the White Wall," he had seen it in his imagination and given orders for its immediate building. A stupendous task! A huge hall to be dug from what had been the ancient bed of the Nile itself, under the enormous building already standing there.

There had been sacrificed the lives

of almost a thousand slaves in the preliminary work before Menni took charge, for the water kept seeping through and drowning the unfortunates every time there was a moment's delay at the pumps.

Menni wasn't an engineer. He was merely a student, then, interested in thoughts and dreams—even of slaves. And Menni had dreamed a dream one night of a race of men who pushed back water with air, just as the wind-god does on the sea.

That was how Menni came to be governor of the palace—not for having discovered a way to save the lives of slaves, but for having made the underground treasure-palace a possibility at all.

Almost completed!

Long, broad, and lofty. No one would have guessed, merely to look at it, that it was far below the level of the Nile, that it had been dug out of the alluvial mud. The grosser work had been finished. The masons were gone. Only the sculptors, the gilders, and the painters remained.

They worked by the light of a hundred lamps and torches — silently and at top speed, for the most part, as a dozen overseers paced up and down with sticks and an eye for shirkers.

Now and then a stick thwacked down on a bare back, and there would be a subdued snicker. The artist who was struck would work with sullen speed for the next ten minutes; but if his feelings had been hurt he failed to give a sign of it. As soon as the overseer was at a safe distance the victim would be grinning and whispering again with the rest.

It was into this great man-made grotto that Menni came on his daily visit, not long after his return from the pyramid. For a long time he stood near the entrance surveying all that had been done. In spite of its magnitude and growing beauty, the place somehow filled him with foreboding.

It was solemn enough, in that flickering light.

This vast hall, a hundred feet wide, a hundred feet high, two hundred feet in length; two mammoth statues, ten feet apart, occupying the middle space of each wall from floor to ceiling — Isis and Osiris, Osiris and Isis, each statue nearly sixty feet high, Osiris with the face of the murdered Metemsa, Isis with the face of Netokris, no less.

And, between these statues on the four sides of the room, flights of stairs leading to an upper level, but blocked instantly—at the will of any one who knew—by massive monoliths which could slide into place as softly as a lady's foot into her sandal. But it was of another marvel of the place that Menni thought as he stood there.

One of these colossi had been so arranged by Metemsa's chief engineer that by a mere touch of a certain lever it would swing outward from the wall and let the flood of the Nile rush in. A most ingenious idea! Royal treasuries had been looted rather often in the past. Would they ever be looted again?

One by one the overseers came forward and saluted him cringingly. More than once an overseer had had his stick snatched from him and had felt it over his own back. Menni had never done such a thing. But you could never tell.

"How about it, Pshadou?"

"In another week, my lord, and the south wall will be ready."

"How about it, Nibamon?"

"In another ten days, my lord, and the east wall—"

"Too long! She who dwells in the palace must have this place in seven days. Draft twenty more artisans, if necessary."

"Your breath is my life, my lord."

Menni had come to the center of the great chamber, had again fallen into melancholy brooding. It was unlike him thus to give himself up to melancholy, however great the provocation.

He wished that Berenice was home from that trip she had taken with her old benefactress up the Nile. He felt

that she had a very large part in his concern. Netokris did not amuse herself by making empty threats. The queen was more likely to find her amusement in carrying her threats into execution.

Netokris!

He felt as though her eyes were upon him now. The feeling grew stronger and stronger, made him feel increasingly depressed and restless.

Once or twice he had lifted his eyes to a certain point in the roof of the chamber where there was a small opening, invisible to eyes unfamiliar with its whereabouts. He had seen nothing there. Yet, still that impression of being looked at.

He passed up and out from the chamber by the flight of steps nearest him and found himself in the corridor which completely surrounded the treasure-house at a higher level. It was all familiar ground to him.

Scarcely remarking his direction, but bent on a thorough investigation, he came to that other and lesser statue which likewise moved to the will of those who understood.

It swung back, and he stood there hesitant, realizing that his forebodings had not deceived him.

He had caught a breath of perfume, had heard a whispered word, and knew that, for the second time within the last few hours, he was in the presence of the queen.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TEAR OF GOD RA.

"I SUMMONED you," she said softly. "I'm glad that you thought enough of me to come."

He remained silent. It was the only thing that he could do. No one was supposed to have enough presence of mind, or of breath, even, when spoken to by the goddess, to reply unless expressly ordered to do so.

"Enter. Don't be afraid." Then, reading his thought: "We'll forget all about what happened over in the pyramid."

He suspected that she was lying, but he felt a certain sense of relief at the prospect of no immediate violence. As the statue swung back noiselessly into place behind him, he had another moment of panic. It was as in that room in the pyramid—the same sultry darkness permeated by the woman's disquieting aura. But Queen Netokris had gone back again to her position at the opening in the floor. He followed her, stood over her as she knelt, looking down.

"I've been admiring your work," she said simply.

"Not mine," he managed to articulate, "but the work of Metemsa, the Osiris."

He held his breath. The queen did not answer, made a pretense of being absorbed in what she saw; but he could tell that his remark had been unpleasant to her.

"Kneel down here beside me," she resumed, after an interval, "so that you may also see. So we are to have it within a week? Do you know what I intend to do?"

"The ways of the goddess are inscrutable, O Isis."

"I intend giving a banquet here to celebrate my ascension to the throne. A marvelous banquet-room! Just think—far below the level of the Nile!"

"May your reign be long!"

"See, I shall have my dais there at the end where the gilders are at work. Ah, to think that I shall have to sit there all alone!"

Menni hesitated. The conversation was again taking a perilous direction.

"There are princes — unworthy of you, yet young, handsome, royal—who would gladly—gladly—"

Netokris had swayed slightly in his direction until her shoulder was touching his. He dared not move. Had he been able he would have given no sign, but his voice faltered in spite of himself.

She laughed, drew back again.

"Poor, foolish boy," she said, with just a touch of bitterness in her tones. "I didn't make you come up here to be tortured. Listen, I was moved by your faithful work, by your steadfastness. I have put you to the test. I have discovered the truth about you."

They were looking at each other through the dim light that came up through the floor. In spite of what she was saying, and the smile on her painted lips, Netokris might have been some beautiful deity of deception and hate.

"What you just said about the princes of the land is true," she went on. "Not one of them but would dishonor the memory of the Osiris by seeking to take his place. You, alone among them, have shown yourself to be faithful to the great memory. See what I am giving you as a sign of my favor."

She had taken a ring from the index finger of her right hand—a heavy circlet of gold in which was set a large sapphire. Even there in the twilight it glowed dark blue with a light all its own. The greatest sapphire of all sapphires!

Menni had drawn back with a movement of almost superstitious dread.

"The Tear of God Ra!"

"Yes, the Tear of God Ra." Netokris laughed. "You know the history of it?"

"I heard it when I was young."

"That the great God Ra wept this single tear when Osiris and Isis were married and sin on earth began! Take it. Wear it. And remember this—that when, some time soon, your life is in danger this will be the talisman to save you."

Menni still hesitated.

"But those who use it to save life—their own lives—thereby sacrifice things dearer than life, so I've heard," he panted.

Netokris had seized his hand in hers, had slipped the ring over his little finger.

"There are many things about the Tear of God Ra, my friend," she said, "that you can never learn except by wearing it. You wear it. I command you. Wear it night and day. When you go to sleep may it bring dreams to you. When you awaken may the dreams become visions; and may dreams and visions both be of—of—"

She leaned quickly forward, caught his face between her hands, and kissed him.

He was still kneeling there as she leaped quickly to her feet and made her way over to the hidden door. There came a flash of yellow light from the corridor outside, then darkness again.

Menni swore softly to himself, thought of Berenice, of the far places of the world. Couldn't he and she escape together? He had been honest in his administration of the palace; but he had been able to put a hundred or so gold collars aside in case of accident.

He looked down at the jewel on his finger. And that—should he be able to get out of the empire with it—would be worth many ounces of gold. But merely to look at it was to feel his courage melting out of him. Did it carry a curse? Did it mean that the wish the queen had expressed in putting it on his finger would some day come true?

It bit into his flesh like a pencil of ice. He started to pull it off, then desisted as he remembered the queen's command. There was still a fighting chance for life and happiness; but he was not fool enough to delude himself with the belief that that chance was brilliant.

He went back and up to the outer air and called two of the swiftest runners of the guard. They belonged to the company of scouts who kept in advance of the swiftest chariots whenever the Pharaoh, god or goddess, went abroad that way.

"Find out for me," he commanded briefly, "where I can see Baknik, high

priest of Ammon, without delay—the pyramid or his house."

The men dashed away with the naked grace and speed of greyhounds. Scarcely had they gone than another messenger came up—this one of another sort, a eunuch from the apartments of the queen.

"From Isis on earth," said the messenger as he brought his face to the ground and held up a piece of folded papyrus.

Menni took the message with a steady hand, in spite of a premonition that fate was adding but another stone to the tomb she was preparing for him. He was right. What he read was this:

> Thou hast the tear-drop of Ra. Keep it well, for there draws near the night of the tear-drop of Isis.

For almost a minute Menni stared at the message, reading it over and over. Not being a priest, he had never been much of a reader. But there was no mistake.

Then comprehension burst upon him and he staggered a little. The night of the tear-drop of Isis!

That was the night that the Nile began to rise—the one night in the year when Egypt offered a human sacrifice—to the river in supplication of a full flood, as the forerunner of a prosperous harvest.

And the offering was always a maiden — young, pure, virtuous, like Berenice!

CHAPTER XII.

BAKNIK, PRIEST OF AMMON.

Memphis was growing more rapidly than ever. Almost half a million inhabitants at the last census, and already the optimistic predicting a million by the next.

Menni noticed the changes as he passed along rapidly on foot. As usual, when making an excursion through the city, unofficial and more or less secret, he had put on a heavy wig of curled hair and a frankly false beard which swung pendulous under his chin. He carried no insignia of rank, was unaccompanied, might merely have been one of the wealthy but despised merchant class.

He followed the line of the immense embankments of the Nile for a mile or two beyond the precincts of the double palace — the *Pharaoh,* which was to give its name to the sovereigns who resided there — passing along walled gardens for the most part, with here and there a double-storied house with its garden on the roof, in the style recently imported from Asia. Then he turned off to the left through a wide district inhabited by the poorer classes.

These classes always interested Menni. He even nourished some sort of foolish conception in his heart that they were as good as the rich and noble.

He smiled at the naked children who trooped round the mud-built houses. The roofs of many of these poor dwellings were more or less artistically decorated with egg-shells — making them cooler and more attractive to the eye.

Most of the men were away from home—some of them at work in the palace, perhaps—but the women were busy, weaving, grinding corn between two flat stones, making bricks of fuel from cow-dung and grass.

Most of the women had their foreheads and bare shoulders tattooed—a cheap and lasting ornamentation, like the egg-shells on their houses.

He came again into a neighborhood of the wealthy, where the road he was following again passed between garden-walls. One of the largest of these establishments was his destination—the home of his old friend, Baknik, priest of Ammon.

Like many of his kind, Baknik was one of the wealthiest men in Memphis —both wealthy and powerful, head of a princely family. His home was a sort of miniature of the royal palace itself—a crenelated wall fully fifteen

feet high surrounding the space of five or six acres, the entire interior occupied by several detached buildings three and four stories in height, highly cultivated courtyards between.

From one of these courtyards a giant, sacred acacia-tree reared its graceful head. It was covered with blossoms, filling the whole neighborhood with its fragrance.

Over a far corner of the wall rose the conical tops of three capacious granaries. Baknik was evidently prepared against a year of famine—a wise and sagacious man in every respect.

Menni swung through the wide gate of his friend's home, into a wide and lofty anteroom adjoining the servants' quarters, was greeted deferentially by Baknik's chief butler, who ushered him at once into the state reception-room and banquet-hall just beyond.

It was a large and lofty apartment—occupying two stories of the building—beautifully encased with beams and panels of painted cedar. Scattered about were numerous small tables and inlaid chairs of cedar and gold, of ebony and ivory.

It was here that the two friends greeted each other. A moment later they passed on through one or two other rooms, mounted a flight of steps, and came out on a broad balcony just under the branches of the flowering acacia.

Baknik, though enjoying a day of rest, was every inch the priest. His head had been freshly shaven. The exquisitely fine linen tunic he wore was immaculate, uncreased.

"Even bad luck is not altogether bad, since it brings you to see me," he said as he clapped his friend on the shoulder.

Even in his unofficial moments Baknik was a wonderful psychic. Those soft, luminous brown eyes of his were perpetually seeing things invisible to most people. It was that way now. There was no need for Menni to say that anxiety, as well as friendship, had brought him on this long errand to the outskirts of Memphis.

Baknik was not yet forty years old, but he had had a remarkable career. An accepted priest at sixteen, a divine father at twenty, a full initiate at twenty-seven.

His face, while ascetic, was lively with sympathy and imagination. When those large, dark eyes of his were not veiled with mysticism they simply danced with intelligence and humor.

As Menni dropped into a chair he smiled gravely, heaved a sigh, held up his hand to show the sapphire ring.

"She who lives in the Double Palace!"

Baknik's face, still smiling, was none the less grave. He looked for a space at the ring in silence.

"Now isn't that just like her?" he murmured. "Now isn't that just like her? Do you know what happened to me the other day when I was summoned to the royal presence? She intimated that I could kiss her foot instead of the ground in front of her. Baknik was slow-witted. No, he couldn't take a hint. He kissed the ground, like any one else!"

In spite of his words, it was evident that Baknik had divined the seriousness of his friend's errand.

"What do you want me to do, my boy?"

"There is so much," Menni answered, "that I hardly know where to begin. Oh, why didn't you take the double throne when you had a chance? There isn't a priest or a prince in Egypt who wouldn't have swung round to you sooner or later. I could have given you the palace guards. I have them in my hand."

Again Baknik smiled that grave smile of his—no humor in it, just sympathy.

"I am lazy," he said, waving his hand around him. "This is world enough for me, empire enough—a fairly comfortable home, two of the dearest wives in the world. I'm lazy—"

"Tell me," said Menni; "are you too lazy—I know you're not—to help me, dear old friend? If there is a man in Egypt who needs the aid of such powers as yours, I'm he."

At this reference to his powers a gradual and beautiful change came into Baknik's fine face. It kept its sympathy, but its quality of ascetic mysticism increased. His eyes, fixed on Menni's, became more somber still.

He had drawn up another chair and seated himself just in front of his friend.

"I know it," he said. "You don't have to tell me. Last night I was in the seventh chamber of the pyramid—high up, high up, where even such as I can see without error. I had gone there to study anew the movement of Orion. But it was not that which I saw. Instead, I saw you and the Pharaoh. She was thinking of you. And you were thinking of Berenice."

"Where is she now?" Menni whispered.

Baknik closed his eyes. His face had gone whiter than it usually was. His voice also came in an almost inaudible whisper.

"I see her on the Nile at Abydos. She and her pious mistress have just visited the tomb of Menes. She buys a tame rabbit from a child. They enter their boat while the slaves make ready to cast off for the journey back to Memphis."

"Is she well?"

"She is well, but she is homesick, thinks of you — thinks of you even now, as she kisses that little rabbit she has just bought. Ah, see, the rabbit has leaped from her arms, has made its way ashore. The children there try to recapture it; but it is well away among the reeds."

The priest opened his eyes. His face was still pale. He was still under the influence of his "concentration," but he smiled slightly.

"Dear Baknik," said Menni, "you are good. But these—these are what stabbed my heart."

He held out the ring and the fragment of papyrus.

CHAPTER XIII.

INTO THE FUTURE.

For a long time Baknik had been seated there, motionless, his eyes again closed, giving no sign of life except his soft and rhythmic breathing.

A chariot stormed by in the road beyond the garden-wall. From the "women's part" of the establishment came occasional gusts of singing and laughter, accompanied by very amateurish playing on a harp. The acacia-tree was swarming with bees.

One of these bees, heavy with pollen, winged its way noisily down to Baknik's face and lit there, walked across one of his closed eyes to his forehead, remained there a while, then flew away again.

The priest had noticed none of these things. He had withdrawn himself from the world as absolutely as though he had once more entered the "seventh chamber" of the pyramid where even such as he could "see without error."

But in his hand he still held the ring and the papyrus. He was conscious of these.

"She who lives in the Double Palace is surrounded by an atmosphere of sudden death," said Baknik very softly, after a sigh, as though he were patiently explaining something which was perfectly obvious to him. "It was always that way—sorcery, black magic.

"The angel of death was standing at her elbow when Metemsa found her bathing on the banks of the Nile and determined to make her his queen. Metemsa didn't know that he was also wooing the angel of sudden death. He didn't know that she sent the dark angel to follow him when she put this ring on his finger.

"The Tear of God Ra!

"Well named. Ammon-Ra will shed many tears because of this. The god wept as the young Pharaoh walked

forth with this blue gem on his finger while the assassins waited."

"Who were they?" Menni whispered.

"Those who aspire to take Metemsa's place—the princes Tentares, Saites, Seti, Amasis, Ai—"

He named half a dozen others while Menni listened breathless. He knew them all intimately, although they were not friends of his.

All of them had been frequenters of the palace while the late Pharaoh was still alive, were among the loudest mourners when the body of the royal victim was found riddled with dagger-thrusts.

But Baknik continued to speak, faster now, with no trace of emotion. He was as one who reads rapidly from an invisible book.

"Netokris herself took the gem from the finger of the Osiris, even while she then thought of the next bridegroom of the pale angel; and her thought was of Menni, governor of the Double Palace."

Baknik said this as though his friend had not been present at all. Menni, for his part, squeezed the arms of his chair a little tighter.

"Him she would have share with her the double throne; but in her sleep that very night—when her double went forth from her physical body to search him out — she found that his double was guarding the sleep of that fair Greek slave known as Berenice. By her arts of black magic Netokris brought Menni to the pyramid, but the pure love of a man for a good woman is always stronger than black magic. Thereupon Netokris gave the Tear of God Ra to Menni."

Baknik's eyes fluttered; he stirred slightly, as though he were about to "come back."

"And is Menni to die?" the governor of the Double Palace whispered, pronouncing his own name without a tremor.

"He is to die now, very soon," said Baknik, as he obviously sank deeper into the silence of complete concentration. "He struggles in the waters of Father Nile, in the waters of our sacred Hapi, God of the Fish."

"And Berenice?"

The blue sapphire had slipped from Baknik's finger to the rug beneath his feet, but he still held the papyrus. He was again reading the words that Netokris had written on it.

> Thou hast the Tear-drop of Ra. Keep it well, for there draws near the night of the Tear-drop of Isis.

There was a moment's pause.

The bees hummed in the acacia-tree. A fish-pedler let out his doleful cry from the road outside the garden-wall. Again from the women's part of the establishment came laughter and music.

Some one was playing the harp so badly that the others were making fun of her. Yet all of these things came even to Menni as from another world.

He had just heard his own death-sentence, as surely as though it had been pronounced by Horus.

"And Berenice?"

"She also will die this present year in the waters of the Nile, and will do so happily—a fair and lovely offering to the Nile before the night of the Tear-drop of Isis."

Menni tried to speak. But for a moment or two, while the perspiration appeared in small drops on his forehead, his voice failed him. Baknik was repeating softly some stanzas from the hymn of the Nile. Menni had heard it before — a solemn and beautiful chorus across the black waters on the night that the Nile began its annual rise.

The great, mysterious river, the maiden arrayed as for a wedding, heart-chilling eddies in the brown waters where the crocodiles and great fishes lurked—

> Vain are all images of him;
> He reveals not his form;
> No temples can contain him;
> Thy law prevails;
> No councilor penetrates his heart;
> O drink away our tears!

"Drink away our tears! But Berenice?"

"Happy! Happy!" the priest went on with perfect tranquillity. "Both she and Menni perfectly happy, though there be tears and anguish before their earthly light goes out. It is a great thing about tears and anguish that, once past, they are gone as irrevocably as the eaten cake. Once drained, the cup of bitterness is empty until the gods choose to fill it again."

"And after we have drained our cup?"

Into the solemnity that had dropped upon Menni like a pall there had come a stain of brighter color—of some new and formless hope.

"Death is only an appearance," said Baknik. "It only exists in the minds of those who have not seen Osiris. No, Menni and Berenice meet again on this earth in a land which is not Egypt nor of Egypt. They know each other and love again, and again they pass into the land of the living shadows. Again they meet—"

"On earth?"

"On earth — under the same stars, the same moon, the same sun. The same are the eternal gods, as well, although called by other names; even as Menni and Berenice are called by other names."

"What are they—our new names?"

There was a gentle, pitiful little quaver this time in the young governor's voice.

Over Baknik's placid face there appeared a slight ripple of difficulty. He was struggling with unfamiliar sounds.

"Aleece — Aleece — that is Berenice!"

"And you see her?"

"Beautiful, even as she is to-day—fair skin, delicate pink under her violet eyes; hair the color of the inside of a ripening fig. Oddly dressed—swathed like a mummy, though the day is warm—and on her head a diadem of straw—"

"Not dead!"

"No, not dead; but smiling and happy. See, she has just bought a little rabbit from some urchins on the bank. She thinks of her Menni as she kisses it—feels a little homesick. She and the older woman who accompanies her go aboard the great boat that awaits them —a great white boat with fire in it—"

Baknik had again paused, rapt in the contemplation of some new mystery. Menni was looking at him with moist eyes. He had not altogether comprehended the last things that were being said; thought, perhaps, that his great and good friend had traversed some dream-cycle and was back again to that previous vision.

The governor of the Double Palace stirred, reached out, and took the papyrus from the unresisting fingers.

The eyes of Baknik fluttered open—deep, mysterious, the eyes of one who has gazed, like Harmachis, the sphinx, into the depths of eternity.

CHAPTER XIV.

BERENICE COMES BACK.

A LADY of great wealth and perfect respectability, but of no great consequence. That would be a fair, albeit somewhat brutal description of the rather more than middle-aged Nefru, who was making her annual trip along the Nile, from Memphis to Abydos, and back again.

She was a widow, but still kept up a considerable establishment in the outskirts of the capital, though, ever since her husband's death, she had spent more than half the time aboard her large and comfortable barge.

Up to Abydos by easy stages, making long stops here and there to visit her own and her late husband's relatives, the numerous slaves of the good lady—even the twoscore oarsmen—enjoyed these outings as much as their mistress did.

It was always regarded as more or less of a scandal among the younger set—the way that Nefru indulged her slaves.

But Nefru was old-fashioned. She was sprung from a generation which still considered its slaves more as children than as chattels. She had no patience with new-fangled standards which made it smart and proper to cut off the head of a valuable slave for a spilled cup of beer or other such trifles.

Her overseer hardly ever used his stick. Her bargemen were fat and happy—as fat and sleek and happy as so many sacred hippopotami.

Her *almahs*, or singing maidens, didn't have to be coerced into music. They sang of their own accord. They took their own advice:

> Make a good day:
> Life will not stay
> But a moment.
> Make a good day,
> Your tomb is gray—
> Gray and gloomy forever.

But, of all this happy, half-spoiled company, there was one more favored than all the rest. This was the slave-girl Berenice.

Nefru, with no children of her own, had always looked on Berenice with doting eyes ever since she had bought her, fifteen years ago, when Berenice had been "thrown in as good measure," along with her mother, who had been brought a captive from some victorious raid beyond the waters of the Mediterranean.

The tender-hearted old Nefru had known well enough that the woman she had bought would not live very long, anyway. Even then her eyes had been on the child.

Perhaps it had been as her cousin—a priest attached to the pyramid of Cheops — had said — that this child and she were related through their "doubles"—that is to say, psychically. Her cousin had even gone so far as to predict that the day would come—in the distant unrolling of the papyrus of the ages—when the little girl herself would be the mistress and Nefru the slave.

With a contented smile on her fat and kindly old face, Nefru thought of this now as she reclined on the high quarter-deck of her barge and watched Berenice through half-closed eyes.

The barge was drifting slowly down the broad bosom of the Nile, the oarsmen giving just enough force to their long sweeps to give the helmsman steerage-way.

In spite of the fact that the mistress was resting—supposedly asleep—there hung about the craft — as there hangs about a bee-hive—a buzz of busy satisfaction.

There were possibly sixty people aboard—slaves every one of them, men and women, except Nefru and her captain. But if any of them suffered from his bondage, he showed no sign.

There was a tinkling of harps, now and then a light quaver from a double flute—a beautiful, rippling chord—a murmur of lazy, babbling conversation.

Nefru, her eyes very bright in spite of the half-closed lids, beamed satisfaction.

The quarter-deck was very high, where it could catch every breeze set up by the motion of the craft, and was shaded by a broad awning of linen striped blue and white.

Berenice toyed with one of the numerous kittens aboard the boat—a kitten in whose fluffy, graceful little body perhaps — so Nefru reflected — there possibly dwelt the soul of a common ancestor, her own and this girl's whom the gods had cast into her keeping in lieu of other children.

Nefru, naturally pious, was always given to reflections like this when returning from a visit to the tombs of the "great ones of Abydos."

They were approaching Memphis. For a long time now they had been able to see the dim, blue tips of the pyramids over the tops of the fringing palm-trees.

The river was becoming more crowded. All sorts of craft were about, from the tiny, reeking dugouts of lone fishermen, squatting naked, motionless, and patient, to an occasional great war-galley — such as the tax-

gatherers of the government used in visiting the Upper Kingdom, or even for traversing the Mediterranean.

There were a good many picnic boats as well—boats hired by the day and filled with noisy young men and hoydenish women for the most part, sending out a reek of beer and ribaldry.

"What is this day?" asked Nefru with disapproval, turning her head slightly in the direction of her captain, who stood just back of her near the helm.

"The first day of Thoth, the Ibis, excellency," the captain answered.

"I detest holidays," said the gentle old Nefru. "Order the women to stay to their quarters and draw their curtains. Just listen to that. It's scandalous!"

A particularly villainous barge was drifting past filled with riotous young stone-masons out for a day. At sight of the *almahs* in Nefru's barge they had sent up a cheer of delight, accompanied by a storm of compliments and invitations.

In the mean time, in response to a spoken word of command, the oarsmen had struck into a swifter rhythm, the overseer on duty setting the time by beating on the mast with the heavy baton he carried.

Berenice had dismissed the kitten to its questing mother, had come over and knelt at Nefru's side. The love and trust that existed between them was indicated by the way the girl had impulsively brought one of the old lady's hands to her lips, and still clung to it as she gazed off down the river toward Memphis.

The girl was everything that Baknik had described her; everything, even, that Menni had pictured her in his mind's eye — slender, radiant, soft-eyed, her fair complexion only slightly darkened by her long sojourn on the river.

A pearl of a girl, if there ever was one!

Just eighteen! It was at that age that one girl out of all Egypt was chosen every year for her beauty and virtue to be the bride of the Nile. Thought of that also came to Nefru as she looked at Berenice.

The thought brought with it a little spasm of—was it anxiety or hope? She could not tell which.

She had often thought of that. It would certainly be a very great honor—the very highest possible tribute—should the Pharaoh select this child of her own house for such earthly immortality. And yet, and yet, would she ever be able to live—would she care to live?—if Berenice, the only daughter she had ever known, were taken away from her, even under such glorious circumstances as that?

Her old heart had begun to quiver a little; a little moisture had appeared in her eyes—such reflections are so terribly real to some old ladies like Nefru—when Berenice, who had been staring ahead down the expanse of shining river, let out a little cry of joy, blushed like a small cloud at dawn, attempted to conceal her emotion by kissing Nefru's withered cheek.

"The governor's barge," she faltered happily.

CHAPTER XV.

"MY SON AND MY DAUGHTER."

BERENICE was not mistaken. Was any girl, in similar circumstances, ever mistaken? Not only was it the official barge of the governor of the Double Palace, but Menni himself was on board. Menni, as tall and straight and handsome—as distinguished and foreign-looking as ever! Yet changed.

Both Berenice and Nefru noticed it as, in response to an interchange of signals, the two barges came to a drifting halt, side by side, and the young governor came aboard.

Nefru had always admired the young man. She would, perhaps, have preferred him to be more of an Egyptian and less of an outlander, but he had even overcome this prejudice.

Besides, ever since Menni had begun to show marked attention to Berenice the old lady had begun a quiet investigation of Menni's standing and antecedents. By ways best known to herself she had learned that his habits were exemplary, that he had not a few gold collars put away in reserve against the proverbial "dry year."

Menni, with a single devouring glance of his gray eyes into the violet eyes of Berenice, had knelt in front of the couch where Nefru, with her perfect, old-family breeding, still reclined, had pressed the dowager's hand to his head and heart.

"My thoughts have been with you."

"Doubtless,' the old lady commented, with a good-natured smile at the fiction. Then more gravely: "You have been working overmuch, I fear. You should have followed us to Abydos."

Menni made a little gesture of despair. He was again on his feet. Nefru, now that form had been recognized, permitted herself to sit up.

"Berenice, child," she said, with assumed severity, "how can you linger there when we have as our guest the governor of the Double Palace?"

As the old lady pointed her wit with a sly smile, Menni seized the permission to turn again and look into the violet eyes lifted to his own.

Berenice was blushing again—a mere shell-pink flush this time—but her gaze was steady. If a look can ever be translated into words—and a good many people think that such a thing might be possible—the words, in this instance, would have been, "My beloved, I have longed for you so, I am longing for you now," or something like that.

His own brief look must have meant the same.

Then he had taken her tapering fingers into his, had repeated—more lightly, this time—the formality of bringing them to his head and his heart.

Pharaohs had done as much where slave-girls were concerned. Why shouldn't he—a mere governor of the royal palace! Besides, wasn't it true—that anonymous inscription on the rocks at Elephantine—that all men, even kings, are born slaves—slaves of consequence?

"Dismiss your barge," said Nefru. "We shall bring you safely to the city."

"The Osiris lengthen your days!" cried Menni quickly. "By Bisou! That official barge is getting on my nerves!"

He turned away to give the command. Nefru turned quickly to Berenice.

"Hasten, my gazelle," she said, "and tell Mimout and Banisit to serve the cakes and wines—the *almahs* to sing the Blue Lotus Song."

As Berenice flitted away, only too happy to serve, even in this small way, the pleasure of the man she loved, Nefru turned again to her distinguished guest.

"You bring me bad news."

"Frightful."

"It concerns—"

"Berenice."

"You realize my evil dreams—I slept, you know, at Abydos."

"Don't be discouraged. I have a plan. I'll tell you all."

It was pitiful to see the pain and the doubt in Nefru's eyes, as she looked up at him seeking to frame the question she desired most in the world, and feared most in the world, to ask. Menni understood.

"Not now," he whispered. "There she is again."

He had heard behind him the quick, light step of Berenice as she returned. At the same moment there came from the lower deck a swift, sweet cadence of women's voices accompanied by flute and harp.

It was a song particularly suited to the Nile, with a pulsing rhythm in perfect harmony to the recurrent glimmer and spray of the flashing oars.

Berenice, without speaking, had

sunk down at the side of Nefru on the divan. The governor of the Double Palace, by shifting the position of his chair ever so little, brought his right hand close to hers. There was no sign in his abstracted eyes to indicate to the fond Nefru what was doing.

But Menni had put out his little finger until it came in contact with the smooth and tepid point of Berenice's little finger.

They had done that the very first time that they had seen each other. It was like the mystic symbol of recognition—the secret "grip"—of an ancient fraternity of which he and she were the only members in the world. A slight smile—the first in days—spread over Menni's face, brought back to it a look of boyishness which seemed, a little while before, to have been lost forever.

Some old women have wonderful intuition—especially wonderful where young lovers are concerned. That is perhaps the one field of scientific research in which women will always be preeminent. Their knowledge, sometimes, is almost uncanny.

That is the way it was with Nefru now. How, otherwise, while still stunned by that hint of disaster, could she have divined that Menni and Berenice were exchanging that mystic grip—touching finger-tips, and have thought of the one most appropriate thing in the world that she could say?

It was apparently apropos of nothing.

"Your excellency will be the first to hear a bit of family news," the old lady said, her eyes still misty. "It is a little premature, for, though the papyrus has long been written, it has not yet been recorded in the temple. But Berenice, whom I dearly love, is henceforth my daughter."

"Oh!"

The exclamation had leaped from the lips of the girl. Her hands were pressed to her bosom. Then, again:

"Oh! Will that—will that change anything?"

There was as much fear as joy in the exclamation.

But Menni had also cried out—a subdued little cry in which there was nothing but unadulterated joy.

"Your daughter, O Nefru!—your daughter Berenice! Oh, can I wait longer to tell you that I also love her dearly?"

The barge was now speeding along through the afternoon sunlight—other craft making way for it; for, just behind, followed the official galley of the governor of the Double Palace. As the rowers quickened their stroke the music of the harpists and the *almahs* also quickened—became a joyous chant with just enough variety in it to keep it from becoming monotonous.

A magical hour, if it had not been for that overhang of tragedy! Every girl, however beautiful and full of life, has her ghostly double. Every Memphis has its city of the dead. Every sunbeam has its shadow. Every pure joy has death for a background.

"Your excellency—" Nefru began, her eyes now frankly tearful.

Menni broke in impetuously.

"Call me son!"

"Oh, to have a son and a daughter!"

Slaves had appeared with goblets of various kinds of wines and platters of cakes.

Regardless of them, or of any one else who might be looking, Menni had thrust an arm about the quivering shoulders of the girl, had drawn her close.

"Betroth us! Betroth us!" he whispered, as he lifted his face unashamed. "It isn't too late. Why shouldn't she be my bride, O Nefru, rather than the bride of the Nile?"

The boat swayed slightly to the movement of the oarsmen. The joyful music pulsed up from below. They were passing now through Memphis Lake—the city of the living on one hand, the city of the dead on the other.

——

The *almahs* had swung once more into that favorite refrain of theirs:

Make a good day;
Your tomb is gray,
Gloomy and gray forever.

Nefru had seized a crystal goblet from one of the waiting slaves, had murmured some half-articulate phrase over the wine that it contained, poured a little of this into her hand, touched the foreheads of each of them with her moistened fingers, then threw the goblet and its contents with an unerring hand into the lake.

The scene must have had more witnesses than even the principals had suspected. For, up from a hundred throats, there rang the old prayer to Ammon-Ra to make this thing eternal.

CHAPTER XVI.

MAN OR THE GOD.

THERE was good, hard logic, as well as sentiment in the whirlwind proposal of Menni, and the sudden betrothal to the freed-woman and adopted daughter of the wealthy old Nefru. It is true that he had acted against the advice of the best friend he had in the world—apart from Berenice and Nefru—the high priest and adept Baknik.

According to Baknik, the events which he had already seen on the painted canvas of the future were as immutable as things which had already been impressed with the seal of time.

For Baknik and his strange, great brethren of the Secret Doctrine, there was no past nor future, anyway, except in the limited and deceptive consciousness of ordinary mortals. They held firm to the strange belief that both the day of a thousand years ago and the day of a thousand years hence were but different aspects of the eternal Now.

But Menni was not an adept. He was still a man—very much of a man—with all a man's young passion, hopes, and determinations still strong within him.

And had not Baknik himself declared that the love of a man for a woman might be the greatest force on earth?

He knew the ancient law. He had been reared under it. He might have been born in distant Macedonia, as it had been told of him, but he was none the less an Egyptian. And he knew that not even the Isis on Earth, she who dwelt in the Double Palace, could change this—the law that the annual Bride of the Nile be an unmarried virgin.

With Berenice as his bride, this danger, at least, would be exorcised. Perils enough would remain, but not this.

He had pursued his dream even further.

With Berenice as his bride, why couldn't he and she do as he had already half planned—escape out of the empire altogether?

He and the aged Nefru remained together on the roof of the latter's house that night long after Berenice had bade them a tender good night. The entire household had sunken into slumber except for the trusted slave whose duty it was that night to guard the outer door. And even he was dozing, most likely.

There was a young moon, only a few days old, but the night was filled with a refulgent glamour. From where they sat they could see the broad bosom of the sacred lake—every great star reflected in its mirrorlike surface almost as brightly as the moon itself.

Now and then a boat passed with some returning revelers, but even their maudlin hoots and songs were mellowed into tunefulness.

"But, oh, my boy, to tamper with the edicts of the gods!"

There was a sort of woful resignation in Nefru's voice.

"The edict has not yet been issued," said Menni stoutly. "Besides, I tell you that I am a man. And what is a man if he is not an immortal? and what is an immortal if he himself is not a god?

Love and anguish had combined to carry him to a higher plane than the one on which he usually thought, though he was more of a thinker, even in ordinary times, than most of the young men of his rank and acquaintance. Not for nothing had he been born in Macedonia.

Nefru now looked at him with admiration, almost with hope.

"But even if you attempted to carry out this wild plan?"

"There are a thousand men, both bound and free, in the palace this very night who would risk their life's blood to help me on my way.

"And look at the river. Do you suppose that Father Nile could bend his majesty to jealousy? No, not even though I robbed him of Berenice. He would be the first to aid us on our flight to happiness. A day, and not a galley of the imperial navy could catch up with us.

"The world is large. I have questioned every foreign slave and traveler, almost, I ever came across. Egypt—I say it with all reverence—isn't the whole world. Far beyond the Red Sea, out through the Gate of Tears, there is another empire greater even than this—an empire of wonderful forests and countless cities incrusted with gold and rubies. Beyond that is another empire still—an empire which extends to a place where the Star of the North is overhead."

"You speak of the kingdom of Osiris, where only the souls go," Nefru whispered. "It lies over against the end of the milky way. Oh, think," she exclaimed, shaking her head—"think of the apes who catch men in their nets!"

"No, no, my dear Nefru. I merely speak of going where other men have gone. Berenice and I could make ourselves a happy home. A little while, a change—"

"Softer; I thought I saw some one in the road over there behind the sycamore."

"And by and by," Menni went on, sinking his voice to a whisper, "you would join us there and pass a sweet and peaceful old age.

"I am too old to leave the Nile. Old trees, my son, can't be transplanted."

"But, I tell you"—fiercely—"conditions at the Double Palace cannot last as they are at present."

"Speak not of the Isis," Nefru whispered. "It is dangerous—more dangerous than to touch an asp. I have seen those who died from it."

Menni laughed bitterly.

"Mother, you listen to a man—your son, so help me Ammon Ra—who is condemned to death; who fears not death—only the sorrow of those he loves. Berenice I love. You I love. But life without the things that the heart clings to—that I do not love. I defy even the one who lives in the Double Palace!"

It must have been that the trusted old slave whose duty it was to watch the outer gate that night had dozed. At any rate he had paid no attention as there slipped past him a black fantom as illusive as a shadow.

Kashta, the Ethiopian minister of Netokris, was justly feared. Not only did he possess very real magical powers. He was also possessed of the most complete system of spies then existent in the world. Some of them were magicians like himself — skilled in hypnotism and other occult arts.

How otherwise could they disappear at will, make closed doors to open, hear conversations which had been breathed in the faintest of whispers behind stone walls?

At any rate a shadow had come and gone while Nefru and Menni talked, and all shadows have ears when things are being said which the speaker would have unheard.

The moon had disappeared long since into the desert. The boats filled with returning revelers had all passed for the night, it seemed. The great stars were still reflected—each one a moon—in the unruffled waters of the sacred lake.

Tears had been shed by Nefru. It was hard to find a son and a daughter on one day only to lose them again at the dawn of the next. Still that would be preferable to seeing them pass forever into the black night of the tomb. Alive, she might find them again. Dead, who could tell? She had never felt in her heart of hearts that she was to see her late husband again.

Menni had risen to his feet. In the four hours still left of the night there was much to do, though he had begun his preparations even before he had spoken to Nefru and Berenice. He had begun to lay his tentative plans from the moment that he had left Baknik's house. He knew where he could find both galley and men.

A marriage at dawn, and then away.

He was still standing there, voicing some sort of a wordless prayer, perhaps, to Father Nile, when he was startled to hear the tread of an approaching company of foot soldiers.

His trained ears told him that they were guards from the palace. He could tell that by the characteristic scrape of spear and shield.

Then even Nefru noticed it.

She had risen to her feet. He put a strong, sympathetic arm about her.

The company was in the road below —had drawn up in front of Nefru's gate.

CHAPTER XVII.

NEFRU OFFERS A SACRIFICE.

It took but a flash of thought, a glint of time measureless even in seconds, for Menni to recognize the truth. His long experience at the Double Palace had made him familiar with the direct methods there in vogue. When the Pharaoh spoke there was no questioning, no appeal. It was an edict straight from not only the supreme power on earth, but the ruler of heaven as well.

An order had gone out for his arrest.

In that flash of thought it was not he himself who was uppermost, however. It was Nefru, the gentle old lady at his side, and, after her, Berenice. That they also were implicated, that he had precipitated ruin upon them, was the overwhelming fact.

Without delay he had turned instantly to Nefru — looked down into her frightened eyes.

"They have come for me," he said steadily, reassuringly. "Don't be alarmed."

But she was not to be deceived.

"My son," she whispered, "you have touched the asp — the sacred *uræus* of the crown, and it has struck."

"No, no. It is merely a summons from the Double Palace."

Even while he spoke he could hear the clear, commanding, harsh words of the captain of the guard.

"In the name of Netokris, who united the two countries, Queen of the Diadem of the Vulture and the Snake—"

This, and then the tremulous, abject words of the slave at the gate protesting that his house and all who were in it belonged, body and double, to the Isis of the Double Palace.

The captain of the guard spoke the name of Menni. The slave did not know — so help him, Ptah, Isis and Osiris, and the shades of the great ones of Abydos! But he would go—

"Did you not hear how he pronounced your name?" asked Nefru, with her eyes still uplifted to those of the governor of the Double Palace. "He spoke it not as one who comes to do you honor."

Menni caressed the old lady's head with his hand.

"Even so, mother, I must hasten down to meet them. See, whatever has happened, I swear to you that I still have influence; can still make the dice roll right. Farewell, I go!"

Still Nefru clung to him. Fright had disappeared from her face utterly. Instead, there was thought — swift, concentrated. She was too old for

panic, had seen too much. After all, Menni and Berenice were nothing but babes compared to her—her babes, and she would save them.

"You must not go," she thrilled, clutching his tunic. "It would be the dungeon—death! I know. Wait!"

She was still thinking hard. Menni sought, gently but firmly, to release himself. The guard had entered the garden, had surrounded the house.

"A moment's delay," cried Menni, swiftly but softly, "and it will mean your destruction and that of Berenice. You harbor an enemy of the Isis! For the love of Ammon-Ra, release me; let me hasten before it is too late!"

"No," Nefru cried again. "Listen! There is yet a way. When my husband, Timaos, was yet alive, he had constructed a secret passage. You know, at one time, he was in trouble. You and Berenice can escape that way."

"And you?"

"I'm old!"

From the garden below there came the sound of a brief scramble, a blow, a scream.

"The voice of Tano—my gatekeeper. They have killed him!"

Had anything else been needed to show that the guards from the palace were on an unfriendly errand, this would have been enough. The old Tano, faithful to his instincts, had doubtless returned to say that the man they sought was not within, had answered for this whitest of lies with his life.

The old Nefru had cast her arms into the air, gazed up at the sky.

"O gods of Kem, do with me as you will; I pledge you my soul for eternity; but keep my children!"

She was still speaking as Menni ran to the doorway of the stairs which led from the roof down into the interior of the house. His straining senses had noticed elements in the sounds below, immediately after the death-cry of Tano, which abolished his last shred of hesitation.

A company of half wild mercenaries at the gate of a rich, private dwelling filled with everything from gold to women; the gate-keeper murdered; the very nature of their errand sufficient authority for the commission of all sorts of excess—even were such authority needed!

Again he thought of Nefru, of the sleeping Berenice, of all the other members of the household—happy, faithful slaves, boys and men, girls and women, all unconscious of the appalling fate that even then was hovering over them. He thought of these things, but it was subjectively.

In his arms, his whole quivering body, he felt the strength of a dozen men. As he dashed down the stairs he looked, with brilliant, all-perceptive eyes, for some weapon.

Then there appeared before him a huge shadow of a man—an Arabian or Persian mercenary, a member of the guard. As swift and silent as a shadow the man had come alone to the upper story with the look on his face of one who expects to meet with his heart's desire. He was so intent on his quest that he had not noticed Menni; had leaped toward a curtained doorway and was peering into the darkened apartment beyond.

Almost completely naked—a polished body, bronzed by the sun, a mop of thick black hair, cut square at his shoulders; a shield gripped by one hand, a heavy spear by the other, a slender, curved sword at his waist.

It was nothing but the briefest of visions, a mere painted shadow cast by the yellow flame of a hanging bronze lamp.

So swift that it was over even before he himself recognized his purpose, Menni had seized a small but exceedingly heavy chair of inlaid ebony, had struck the shadow to the floor. A thud, a stifled gasp, and the governor of the Double Palace was standing there with the mercenary's sword in his hand. Had bone and thew become liquid lightning he would have felt as he felt now.

There was no weight in him at all, just dynamic force. He cast one quick glance about him, then, without feeling the steps beneath his feet, was in the lower hall.

There he was, face to face with a group of guardsmen—four or five of them. At sight of him their expressions had changed, they had quailed back against the wall.

"Where is your captain?"

They chattered that they didn't know, gave random information.

A storm of cries came from another quarter—outside, some place. Menni leaped for the door as the clamor grew louder, paused there, then himself uttered a low cry as he located the storm-center in the building where the women were quartered. Only a second he tarried. He turned to the mercenaries, still cowering in the hall. His words were as quick and keen as electric sparks.

"I'm master here. Guard this house as you value your souls!"

There are times when words convey all of the fierce meaning behind and above them like the claws of an eagle.

Menni had disappeared, his words still vibrant in the minds of the men he had left behind him. An Ethiopian of the guard had entered the hallway. He had a smudge of blood on his cheek. His eyes were aflame. He started for the stairs. He was impaled by a spear before he had gone up two steps.

Nefru's house, like those of her wealthy neighbors, was entirely surrounded by a high wall. Besides the principal residence there were other buildings—granaries, quarters for the men, quarters for the women—the latter the prototype of the zenanas and harems of the East.

Slashing with his deadly keen sword, but doing more effective service still with elbows and his one free hand, Menni had fought his way into the house of the women—a suffocating struggle through clamoring guards and shrieking slaves.

A brief, hideous shambles and he was recognized. It was no mere triumph of physical strength. It was the triumph of authority, of mind and will.

Flickering yellow light, a dozen prostrate forms, growing stains on the floor, passion and revolt gone out of them in that first fierce explosion, and the survivors were cowed, ready to crawl.

Unfatigued, his gray eyes narrow and scintillant, Menni huddled the remnant out into the garden, with his own hand stripped them of their arms.

From the quarters where the men had been sleeping appeared a furtive, silent band—bargemen, most of them, eager for they knew not what—a wild hope for nameless things, tempered by the chill ghost of sudden death.

They also had recognized Menni. Most of them, that very afternoon, had seen him betrothed to Berenice. Was he not of their house?

"Bind these men—take their arms!"

A dozen of the slaves had leaped to obey while the words were still in his brain.

The bargemen were used to tying knots. Even in their small way they were sailormen. They were possessed of gigantic strength.

As Menni turned once more toward the house of Nefru a fresh confusion of sound smote him through.

Lesser than anything he had been hearing, yet infinitely more terrifying!

His shoulder was adrip with sweat and blood. He swept his hand over it for a heart-stilling second, then dashed forward.

He had heard a few broken words in the voice of Berenice, a rising protest in the voice of Nefru, both answered by gruff accents he recognized as coming from the captain of the guard.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ACROSS DARK WATERS.

It is most likely that Ennana, captain of the company who had been sent on the extraordinary mission that night of

bringing into the presence of the Isis the person of his own superior, Menni, governor of the Double Palace, was better versed in palace politics than most men.

Ennana was a good deal of a politician himself. He was sprung from one of the lesser princely houses of the lower kingdom. He had seen men less favored by birth rise high in the administration of the empire. But, like so many men in whom ambition runs high, he lacked the force of character to realize his dreams.

Hitherto he had always sought to accomplish his ends by stealth and flattery. Did this, even while denouncing himself for it in private and hankering for the boldness which put other men ahead. And, as so often happens, he had gradually accumulated a reserve of desperate resolution which would be sufficient, when the time came for one bold move, at least. The moment that he had received the command for Menni's arrest he was thrilled with the conviction that the time had come.

He was handsome, had cherished his own secret hopes of winning the regard of Netokris on that account. She had had no eyes save for Menni.

Menni in disfavor!

He, Ennana, sent to arrest him!

What possibilities did not lie before him!

He was filled with nervous excitement. At moments he was shot through by qualms of shaking fear; but, on the whole, there was the unbridled joy and hope of himself becoming Menni's successor, not only in the stewardship of the Double Palace, but in the regard of Netokris herself.

There is nothing so absolutely positive as the fact that authority is a gift from the gods. A school-teacher who hasn't received the gift can't exercise it, any more than can a captain of the guard. Not a man who followed Ennana through the dark streets of Memphis that night but felt within the innermost depths of his being that here was his own chance as well.

Ennana for himself! Each for himself!

Scarcely had that first summons been delivered at Nefru's gate than the captain of the guard sensed mutiny and desertion. In vain had he sought to show himself the man of power by striking dead Tano, the gate-keeper, when that old slave returned.

A dozen of the guardsmen had seized the opportunity to spring forward into the garden—a wavering second, then others followed.

Ennana had cried an unheard order, rushed after his own men, found himself alone and in comparative darkness. Trembling, mad, desperate, and this was the opportunity he had waited for!

He was no fool, even while panic scourged him into action.

Better acquainted with the architecture of such places than his men could possibly be—low-born and foreign, all of them—he took a mental survey of the place, guessed where lay the apartments of Nefru and Berenice. Where else would he be so certain to find the man he had come to seek?

To find him immediately, that was the most important thing. He would appeal to Menni as a man of sense and order, would serve him with the warrant, get him away from the house and have him bound. And then—ah, then, what could not he and his men do!

Menni would not be so handsome with a black eye, two or three teeth missing. He himself would see to that.

Quick! Up the back way—the passage that always existed between the cook-house and the main dwelling; that would be the safest road to take.

But Ennana had difficulty in forcing the door, and once within found himself face to face with the old Mimout—a black crone, still powerful, who had belonged to Nefru when they both were children. She blocked the way, was deaf to Ennana's muttered threats and curses, until he had strangled her into submission.

He lost more time in the upper chambers of the house, saw the man he was

after appear on the stairs, then, while he watched, petrified and silent, saw the tragedy that followed.

The women! They were his only hope. Menni would never go away and leave them.

As soon as that human death-bolt had disappeared down the steps Ennana was rushing up in the direction from which Menni had appeared. He came to the roof, found Nefru, the mistress of the house, still standing, her arms up, her voice quavering out the offer of her soul to the gods in exchange for the safety of her children.

"Behold, your wish is fulfilled," cried the captain of the guard.

That spectacle of feminine love and weakness had done more to bring his own courage back than anything else could possibly have done.

Nefru looked at him, recognized him by both his words and his appearance as an officer.

"Who are you?"

"Ennana, the captain. Quick, where's the girl? I have but just now met Menni on the stairs. I give you both my protection!"

In a sudden reaction from her momentary desperation; with, even then, a glimmering hope that that offered sacrifice of hers had already been heard with favor by the gods, Nefru hurried back into the house with all the speed at her command, her thoughts on Berenice.

Ennana followed, a gloating sense of ultimate victory now pumping higher and higher in his heart.

Nefru had come to the end of a curtained corridor, stopped before an open door, turned to the captain of the guard.

"Pause here while I warn her," Nefru said.

But the captain of the guard brushed past her, stood within the room beyond.

There is a quality of the clear Egyptian night that renders things visible. It was this way now. The room was flooded with the blue refulgence of out-of-doors streaming through two uncurtained and unglazed double windows.

On a narrow, linen-covered couch, her fair head supported on a carved wooden "rest," Berenice still slept—a vision of innocent beauty that made even Ennana gasp. A second or two he stood there, gazing with all his eyes, then Nefru clutched him by the arm.

"Out! Out!" she whispered fiercely. "What do you mean? Fool! Should Menni know!"

Ennana turned to her with an insolent and impatient laugh.

Nefru, outraged, but still not comprehending, again protested, softly still. If she expected Berenice to sleep on uninterruptedly, however, the hope was vain. Hideous clamor had broken out in the yard below in the direction of the women's quarters.

Berenice stirred, sat up, an expression of bewilderment and dawning alarm on her face. She saw Nefru seize a strange man by the arm, attempt to thrust him back through the door, while the clamor out of doors grew louder.

Followed in that chamber a turmoil of wild confusion, of sickening effort to shake off this nightmare into which she had awakened from such wonderful dreams of love and peace.

Who can measure the length of any nightmare?

There was struggling confusion in which Berenice felt that she was only dimly conscious of her own wild efforts to aid her aunt; then, afterward, to free herself. An eternity of nightmare! Then—"Nefru! Berenice!"

Ennana had whirled at the sound of that voice. Fear gripped him. All that postponed force of character and unrequited ambition was flaming hot.

No use! His hour was past!

He knew it even as he rushed at Menni—a statue of Nemesis there in the door, recognized it in his last despairing flash of consciousness as the thin, curved blade Menni still carried pierced his side.

Calm, self-possessed, a rock of strength for Nefru and Berenice shud-

dering at his side, Menni stood a few minutes later looking up and down the bank of the sacred lake.

"They have taken their precautions," he murmured.

Nefru's barge, which was generally anchored there, had disappeared.

"It is well," said Nefru. "Let us make our peace with the gods."

Out of the shadows of the bank a skiff appeared, the craft of a humble, nocturnal fisherman.

"Here," cried Menni in a voice that was soft, but still vibrated with the accent of command. "We would cross over."

The fisherman, wondering, obeyed.

A few moments later and they were gliding across the dark waters toward the huge blue ghosts of the pyramids —toward the City of the Dead.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FOUR WHITE GEESE.

THE high priest, Baknik, had again sought the seventh chamber of the pyramid of Menkaura, intent on his observations of Orion. More than any other member of his brotherhood, he was absorbed in the contemplation of the stars and planets.

He was better endowed. He had known moments of ecstasy, especially there in the seventh chamber, when his spirit left the weight of his body behind it and soared off free to celestial heights.

Baknik and his kind—never numerous at any period of the world's development, though there have always been a few of them — could study, without other instrument than that of the spirit, the infinitely great or the infinitely small — could cruise at will through space, whether that space lay between molecules or stars.

It was a cubical room, not more than twelve feet square, sides, floor, and roof of massive stone, not more than one joint or seam on any one surface.

A little while before one of these joints had opened noiselessly to admit the priest, then closed as noiselessly behind him. The cube was hermetically sealed. None but an initiate could have lived in such a place for more than an hour or so at the most.

Baknik, exquisitely clean, as became the members of his cult, spotless both as to body and raiment, had already composed himself to the temporary death which was the only means of setting the spirit completely free—had taken his position on the cruciform stone couch which occupied the center of the chamber.

In a physical sense, darkness and silence were absolute. But a few seconds had elapsed when the breathing of the adept—barely perceptible even from the first—became extinct.

But Baknik was conscious neither of darkness nor of silence. It was as though the mountain of rock about him had dissolved into air. He was free in the calm, luminous atmosphere of the night, looking down upon the wide, blue, artificial sea between Memphis and the Necropolis.

His attention wafted upward to the stars and the interlying gulfs of space. But there he remained poised, some prescience of earthly developments drawing him back as by a silken thread.

He felt no fear, no impatience, no surprise. There was no emotion in him other than a sort of all-wise, all-embracing sympathy. He was in perfect harmony with all that was.

Then there penetrated his consciousness, much as a small, earthly sound might penetrate the vast solitude of the upper night, a thought of his friend Menni. It was true that he had foreseen Menni's approaching death. He thought of it now without emotion. The fact roused no more emotion within him than the contemplation of any fact. It was always beautiful, the truth.

But there was something more than that. Menni was not yet dead. Menni had need of him still.

Though Baknik had looked forward

to this night of contemplation and study, there was no slightest trace of disappointment in him as he deftly re-entered the seventh chamber of the pyramid, again took possession of the quiescent body on the cruciform couch.

Baknik stirred and sat up. There had been no lapse of consciousness. It was merely as though he had slipped on a heavier garment over a lighter one. The seam that had admitted him into the chamber again opened and he passed on out. Six times after that he passed through chambers which he found hermetically closed and which he left hermetically closed behind him.

He came at last to the long, narrow, perfectly straight tunnel near the base of the pyramid that led to the outer platform, slowly made his way along this, aware, by the small and twinkling star he could see in the velvet darkness beyond the tunnel's mouth, that dawn was yet an hour away.

As he emerged into the outer air he was not surprised to see three figures approaching from the direction of the lake, nor was he surprised to recognize these as his friend Menni, and Menni's friends, Nefru and the girl Berenice. He lifted his hand in silent greeting, stood awaiting them.

There were two temples on the platform of the pyramid of Menkaura, instead of the four each which stood on the platforms of the larger but less beautiful neighbors of this one—temples to Isis and Osiris, the male and the female aspects of the same god-principle, of the same Unknowable One.

Berenice and her foster-mother had gone into the temple of Isis. Menni and Baknik into the other.

"You have done well to come," said Baknik with gentle friendship. He was still more or less under the domination of his recent spiritual flight. Nothing that Menni and the women had told him had greatly stirred him. These things were finite, ephemeral, earthly, and of no great consequence. "You have done well to come."

"I hesitated on your account, dear friend," said Menni; "but our good Nefru insisted. Now, for my part—married in the heart and by the spirit—"

"Why, on my account."

"I didn't want to bring disaster down on you, as I did on them. Is there a greater curse than to make those you love share your suffering?"

"Menni," said Baknik, "I have told you that you are condemned to die, and to such it is permitted me to speak of things otherwise forbidden."

"Say on!"

Menni's voice was steady.

"You speak of bringing down disaster upon me; bringing suffering on those you love. You could not bring disaster upon me. You could not bring suffering on those you love. Each can do these things for himself, but not for others."

"Netokris!"

"Not even Netokris. She can cut your body to pieces, but she can't touch you. She can burn my body on the refuse-heap, out there at the city's purification-plant, but she can't touch me."

"But our mummies—the mummies of our ancestors!"

"A token of respect to the departed double. We say, here dwelt an immortal thing, essence of the unknowable. It is holy ground. Let us preserve it from contamination. But the reality, my friend, is beyond the power of mortal revenge."

"But if I am to die—"

"Why should you marry Berenice? You will unite your soul to hers. A beautiful thing—two souls just wed—a nuptial journey into the ether."

"You can promise these things?"

"Yea, in the name of the gods!"

"The will of the gods be done! When—when—"

"For death be ready even as though you knew the hour."

They had reached the far extremity of the temple where a lofty statue of Osiris reared its dim height in front of them, and there they stood, their arms crossed—right hand clasping the

left shoulder, left hand clasping the right shoulder—while a watchful acolyte, recognizing the high priest if not the governor of the Double Palace, threw fresh incense into the pans of the tripods.

It was a peculiar thing. As often as Menni had looked upon the sculptured face of the god—in the temples; in bold relief along the cliffs which, in places, reared their height on the borders of the Nile; in the new treasure-house of the Double Palace—as often as he had looked on the graven features of the god he had never seen him look quite like that.

The look was no longer blank and indifferent. It was the expression of one who smiles at the dawn of eternity. Would he smile like that when the hour his friend had predicted drew near. He hoped so. He resolved that he would.

And Berenice!

The girl and her foster-mother also must have been experiencing similar meditations. They were calm, serene, almost joyful, as they appeared again. The Egyptian priests always did claim that the worship of the gods was never so potent as when the postulant stood in the shadow of a great misfortune.

Almost dawn!

They stood together—Berenice and Menni—on the pyramid-platform looking into each other's eyes.

"No regret, beloved?"

"No regret!"

Later, when once more struggling in the net of circumstance, they were to recall that supreme declaration just before the priests summoned by Baknik began to intone the wedding-chant.

The song throbbed up, slow and solemn, while Menni and Berenice stood there clasping hands—behind her the kind-faced old Nefru, smiling for all the tears she was trying to keep back and couldn't; behind him Baknik, his head bowed forward somewhat, in his deep, brown eyes a look of ineffable sadness for all his spiritual convictions.

Two young priests had brought, with great solemnity, a covered basket, large and square, and placed it just in front of where the bride and bridegroom stood.

There was no interruption of the chant as Baknik stepped forward and stood for a second or two, hesitant, as though waiting.

There had been an increasing brightness in the air, so gradual that the eyes, accustomed to the darkness, were suddenly surprised to find it day.

Purple, then gold! The sun-god, Osiris, born again, had thrust his crown above the edge of the world.

"And thus will your souls, and mine, my children," said Baknik, leaning over the basket, "feel the kiss of Osiris—east, south, west, or north!"

As he straightened up, four white geese lifted their heads from the basket, then, with a whir of wings, were beating up into the air. For a while they fluttered there—white and red, more like angels than birds in the level rays of the sun—then sped away into space.

All eyes had been straining to follow the flight. Such is the blessed, childish quality of human nature—to watch a pretty spectacle even when the grim and terrible is near.

There was a sudden hush, a sort of whispered chorus:

"The Isis! The Isis!"

No one had seen her approach. She had come silently as that dark angel which Baknik himself had said was ever lurking at her elbow.

They saw her—both at the same time, Menni and Berenice, as they brought their eyes down from the sky. She was looking at them unsmilingly.

Netokris!

CHAPTER XX.

GUESTS OF HONOR.

She had had an evil night—had Netokris. Over in the Double Palace

startled attendants were even then discovering the body of the theretofore all-powerful Kashta.

It seemed strange that so mighty a man could have fallen victim to such a tiny weapon—a mere needle of a bodkin with a jeweled handle.

"The tooth of an asp is small like that," one of the men whispered.

It was a veiled reference to the Isis, wearer of the Diadem of the Serpent. That was all.

Netokris might have been able to conciliate her feelings to Kashta's methods if he had not blundered; but when one frightened guard after another straggled back to the palace with news of what had happened in Nefru's house, Netokris was torn with such shame and rage as even she had never known before.

It was all the more deadly in that she was denied expression of it. She had no tears. No curses were adequate. She had used up all that she had ever known on far lesser occasions than this.

Kashta, enough of a magician to know that this was a peril he could only exorcise by confronting it, sought out the queen—the queen whom he himself had created. He looked at her, and as he looked all strength went out of him.

So subtle and strange is death, despite man's long familiarity with it, that even magicians are often unable to recognize it until it stands there close at hand.

Once more Kashta attempted to say the thing that he had said the other day:

"Oh, no, you won't; you won't kill—"

His tongue clicked even as he said it. He knew that he was saying that which was not true, even as the words came back to him.

A wild, fierce joy had come into the greenish eyes of Netokris. Here was the way that she could express at last all that was burning in her mind and heart.

She had always carried that tiny weapon for herself—death, painless, instantaneous, whenever she might wish it.

She laughed as she thrust the dagger into Kashta's breast.

A bad night!

No more news to be had from the guards who had returned. They had been whipped to ribbons already. Yet, not another word to be had. The messengers she had sent to Nefru's house had come back with nothing more than what she had already learned.

Ennana dead, a score of others dead or dying. Those kindly-treated slaves of Nefru's had evidently been able to keep alive within them, along with those other qualities that kindness and good food nourished, a spirit of fighting independence.

But, even so, she could see the hand of Menni. Ah, gods of darkness, spirits of the infernal regions, what a man!

And he scorned her!

She was glad that she had killed Kashta. She was glad that the blundering fool Ennana was gone. She would see that neither body was given burial.

There was a small apartment not far from the open room where Netokris usually slept, into which no one had ever penetrated except she herself, Kashta, and a certain black attendant—an acolyte of black magic whom Kashta had brought from Ethiopia. Into this room the queen had gone.

Her soul was sick with murder—she could have murdered every human being in the palace and still have found no relief other than that which she had already experienced in slaying Kashta.

But the murder of Kashta had suggested an even greater crime. Kashta was the hierarch of the oldest religion in the world. His temple was the room into which none but he and his attendant and Netokris ever went.

A small room, but lofty, lighted by a green bronze lamp suspended from the ceiling, eerily draped with long

green curtains. Even now Netokris felt a dilation of her heart as she entered, for here was kept the only thing in the world which had ever commanded from her a feeling akin to reverence. Her eyes rested upon it, while that light of savage joy rekindled in them.

She was looking at a small serpent, not more than two feet in length, which, at her entrance, had reared up its body and begun to sway.

For an interval she looked at it, her eyes no less steady, hypnotic, and deadly than those of the serpent itself.

"Speak!"

She hissed the word mockingly.

"Listen. I have just slain Kashta. You spoke to him, gave him your wisdom. Now speak to me, or I shall slay you as well!"

She was deriving a feeling almost of peace from her own words. She was defying this ancient serpent which Kashta, and even she herself, as well as the black magicians throughout the world, had worshiped.

The serpent had spread its hood, was again swaying slightly.

Netokris spat at it. There was no response.

For a while she contemplated this astounding fact, then, from its place behind the curtains, took out an ebony bar which Kashta had used in his magic ceremonies. It was with this—an implement no less sacred than the serpent itself had been—that she beat the reptile to death.

Refreshed, exhilarated—with an exhilaration, however, which she herself recognized as artificial, as that which is created by the use of potent but deadly drugs—Netokris went through the palace and summoned her people to carry her to the pyramid of Menkaura. It was there that Metemsa was entombed.

Her only thought just then, perhaps, was that this was the only place left to her for further sacrilege, should she be in the mood for it.

But, as the royal barge swam across the waters of the silent, spirit-haunted lake, a feeling of sullen melancholy replaced the recent storm. Like many of her kind, she possessed at times a sort of clairvoyance, and she became increasingly certain that in this present excursion of hers she was guided by the hand of fate.

Was that hand itself to be guided henceforth by the spirit of the murdered Kashta, by the still more potent spirit of the sacred serpent she had killed?

As if in answer to the questioning of her own heart there came to her from the direction of the pyramids a solemn chant.

At first she didn't notice it particularly. There were often nocturnal services over there, especially when death was stalking abroad, as he usually was.

Then, all of a sudden, she was listening with a thumping heart, with open lips, irregular breathing.

The priests were chanting a wedding-hymn.

A wedding-hymn!

She thought of Menni, of the girl Berenice. They had fled together.

Thus far her reasoning took her, then she denied its right to lead her farther. As in a daze—awful, though self-imposed—she dismissed her litter-bearers at a distance from the pyramids, then proceeded toward her destination alone and on foot.

The night was purple—purple with the approach of dawn. Would the purple of her own heart, she wondered, ever know the fresh, sweet gold and scarlet of another sort of dawn?

She had rounded the pyramid and passed behind the temple of Osiris, had walked silently up to where a row of shaven priests were chanting the dawn of a new day for these two spirits just united in marriage eternal, and the dawn of this other day upon which the reborn Osiris was casting his first level rays.

Up into the radiant air, like delivered souls, the white geese fluttered.

Then they saw her—the people there.

As Menni and Berenice moved to prostrate themselves before her, as all the others there had already done, except the tear-blinded old Nefru, who was seeing nought but her children, and Baknik, engaged in his holy office, Netokris raised her hand.

She was still unsmiling. But a feeling of joy and pain so intense as to almost suffocate her was swirling through heart and brain.

There was joy in this fierce torture she herself was undergoing, joy in communicating such torture to others.

"Nay, my doves," she said as softly as she could. "Nay, do not prostrate yourselves. I come as your protectress, Isis, but Isis who loves you well."

She paused.

"Come, be my guests of honor at the Double Palace."

CHAPTER XXI.

NETOKRIS GETS A WARNING.

MENNI, at least, had taken the queen at her word. He stood very straight, looked at her with level eyes for a second or two.

"The Isis will permit me," he said. Then, turning to Baknik, who, after his first low bow, had also remained erect: "You will care for our mother."

He indicated the kneeling Nefru.

She was still kneeling there as they went away.

Silence hung over the royal barge as it recrossed the lagoon toward the Double Palace. It needed but the wailing of mourners to have made it a funeral-boat.

For, between Berenice and Menni—Berenice on her left hand and Menni on her right—sat Netokris, bright-eyed but absorbed. It was as though the bridal pair were on opposite sides of a granite wall—a wall without a door.

What were the meditations of the queen? Who could tell? Who can ever tell what the broodings of a woman are when she has everything on earth but the one thing she most desires, the thing that she knows will be denied to her forever?

No reference to the events of the preceding night, neither while the royal barge was crossing the lake nor afterward.

It all happened as in a dream, not for Menni only, but probably for the two women most concerned as well. The great catastrophe, the crushing blow, is always anodyne.

Menni recalled with a smile a certain princely friend of his. This friend had just been ruined—estates confiscated, family sequestered, he himself ordered as a common soldier into a legion departing for a foreign campaign—all as a result of a quarrel with the Pharaoh.

This man had met Menni, smiled upon him, called attention to two playful butterflies circling in the clear air overhead. Five minutes later he had poisoned himself.

Menni recalled the incident as the barge drew up at the landing-stage of the Double Palace. Like that former friend of his, he was submerged in inevitable, unspeakable tragedy, but he noticed that one of the Nubian litter-bearers had a broken sandal-string. He smiled as he thought how the litter-bearer must have regarded that broken string as a tragedy.

Men are always regarding things like that as tragic until real tragedy envelops them.

It was in keeping with the quality of the day that there should befall a certain other nightmarish incident which must here be recorded before proceeding to the narrative of ultimate happenings which now loom big and dark on the horizon.

They were taking breakfast together—the last breakfast, or meal of any kind, they should ever take together on earth, so far as the appearance of things was concerned.

Berenice, Menni, Netokris!

It was in one of the lesser chambers of the palace—large and magnificent though it was; a room, like so many of the others in the Pharaoh palace, with walls on three sides only, a row of lotus-capitaled columns on the other.

An ideal plan for the hot, clear days and nights of Egypt; a man-made grotto, cool and shadowy, looking out upon the limitless prospect of deep blue sky, of dark-green foliage and splashing fountains, of other painted walls and pillars further on; an occasional flash of color as tame birds of gorgeous plumage fluttered about; a group of gardeners passing by—slaves, white, brown, black, naked save for their loin-cloths of striped, coarse linen.

There were three low tables, not much more than ankle-high; cushions on the richly carpeted floor instead of chairs—this being less formal and more intimate. The queen in the center, her two guests seated to the left and the right of her.

There had, as yet, been not a single opportunity for conversation. Even while the Isis was in her own private apartments, a small army of slave-girls had surrounded Menni and his bride, had kept them apart while anointing them with perfumes and decorating them with lotus-buds.

Neither the queen nor Menni nor Berenice wore much else than the necklace of such flowers and their all but transparent skirts of fine linen.

The queen, as hard and radiant—and as silent—as a jewel, smiled upon them. Berenice also smiled, but she was too wonder-struck for happiness; was just beginning to grasp the sombrous portent of all that was going on.

At first she had put it down to the fact that she had married an illustrious man; but intuition had not been slow in hinting at the dread possibilities which filled the mind of her new lord and master. For, though Menni smiled as well, it was none the less the smile of that friend of his who, in the shadow of death, had called attention to the butterflies.

A smile, so far as he was concerned, was called forth no more by the requirements of politeness than the look of outraged surprise he had seen on the faces of the guilty princes Seti, Saites, Asis, Tentares—regicides, suitors for the hand of the queen—whom they had passed in the outer courtyard of the palace.

Four old harpists, shaven like priests, had taken their position in a corner of the room, had struck up a lilting refrain.

Slave-girls, painted and perfumed, brought food and drink—fruit, syrups, meats, and biscuits, both cold and hot; wines and beers, water from the Nile made clear and sweet by having been strained through almond-paste.

Then, while yet they had scarcely touched their viands, while the harpists were still engaged on their first lilting theme, that nightmarish incident—not nightmarish then, nor inexplicable, as it was later—only solemn and impressive.

Quite suddenly, coming up the steps from the garden, appeared Baknik, the high priest. By right of his high office, as well as of his princely house, he was free to come and go in the palace at will. But that he should thus come unbidden into the presence of the queen-goddess at a moment like this—that was unheard of.

The moment that Menni had recognized his friend he had glanced at the queen, saw a look flash across her glittering eyes that he had never seen there before. She had been taken by surprise. He would have sworn, even, that there was an element of fright in the look.

As for Baknik, he had never appeared more composed, nobler.

"I come not to eat, but to deliver a message to you, O Netokris," he said softly—"a message in the presence of these two."

Netokris looked at him as she might have looked at a magical handwriting on the wall.

"What is your message, O Baknik?"

"This O queen—that whatever you do to these children of ours you do in the shadow of your own death."

From Berenice, a little gasp; from Menni and the queen a moment or two of breathless silence. There was irony in the advice of the *almahs* who had just appeared with their prologue:

Make a good day;
Your tomb is gray—

Then the queen spoke: "All that we ever do is in the shadow of death, O Baknik."

"Not only your death I announce, but the end of the dynasty, O Isis."

The incredible words were as softly spoken as though they had merely foretold a minor campaign against the rebellious tribes of the desert.

Netokris affected a laugh.

"It isn't good form to promenade a mummy at breakfast," she said. "In our set that is usually reserved for more formal occasions—dinners and banquets of state. But since you have said this much, be so kind, good Baknik, as to tell me who will be my successor."

—There were many thoughts revolving in the mind of the queen just then, no doubt—the annihilation of the detested princes who had swarmed the palace ever since the murder of Metemsa, the death of not only Menni and Berenice, but of Baknik himself.

None could speak to her as he had spoken and continue to live. But the very next words of Baknik were the most astounding of all.

"It is I, Baknik, who shall succeed you."

The harpists thrummed on their harps. The row of *almahs* swayed like young rushes in the breeze and sang as softly as the breeze itself. The birds of gorgeous plumage and the fountains added their notes of light and life and color to the courtyard beyond the painted pillars, but neither Netokris nor Menni noticed any of these things.

"It is I, Baknik, who shall succeed you."

This, and then the priest had turned his dark eyes on the two whom he had so recently made one.

"Whatever happens don't be afraid," he said. "Life is not all of life, nor is death all of death."

They were the last words that they ever heard him speak. While they were still under the influence of his amazing appearance there, and of the still more amazing things that he had said, Baknik was leaving by the way he had come.

To the slave-girl attendant who was at her side at that moment the queen gave the languid order:

"Our great friend Baknik is not to leave the palace. Warn the guard."

CHAPTER XXII.

A WARD OF THE ISIS.

NOTHING had changed, so far as outward appearances were concerned. But when were outward appearances ever of more than secondary importance where human hearts were concerned!

The deep, clear-shadowed portico with its painted columns and high frescoes, the bald old harpers in the corner strumming on their curved, ornate instruments, the double file of maidens who sang and danced while other girls came and went with the scarcely touched viands; outside the slumberous, almost deserted garden with the intensely blue sky above; a splotch of empty sunshine there where Baknik had been standing but a few seconds before.

He had come and gone, and that was the only visible change.

But had a crumbling earthquake fallen upon the earth it could scarcely have made a greater difference to the three who pretended to be at breakfast.

To the girl Berenice, already more or less overwhelmed by the stupendous events of the last few hours, Baknik's advent and the things he had said were of the nature of an earthquake sure enough, one that had shaken her world to pieces. A little while ago she had

been moving in a golden dream—just married to the man she loved, guest of "her who lived in the Double Palace," one whom she had never even dared in all her young life to so much as mention by name; and from this dream she had been plunged into lurid, unspeakable nightmare.

Her eyes went darker. Her lips were open. She was breathless. She looked across at Menni.

Menni looked back at her with a tense smile of high excitement masterfully controlled. His own gray eyes were gleaming.

Then both of them looked at the queen. Netokris returned the look with indolent poise, but they both noticed that her hand trembled slightly as she dipped her fingers into the scented water. Suddenly she shrugged her shoulders and smiled.

"Poor fellow!" she exclaimed softly. "I fear that he has been communing overmuch with the gods."

"There is no truth, of course, O Isis, in the things which he said."

Menni's voice was so softly pitched that Berenice herself could scarcely hear what he said. But she felt instinctively that some dreadful peril hung over them both, that he was making some bold play for their self-preservation. She had become the mere spectator, as Menni and the Isis looked into each other's eyes—each knowing much that lay in the other's thought.

"Who knows better than my governor?" she answered him. "I have heard it said that you also can look into the secrets of the gods, at times."

"Yes, at times."

"Now?"

"Even now, to some extent, O Isis."

The queen was looking at him fixedly, smiling slightly, perfectly aware—he knew—of the game he played.

"And what is it my governor sees?"

"The Isis in beautiful form—great and generous, of life everlasting; and in her presence, dazzled by her refulgence, two of her unworthy subjects upon whom she will never cease to shine!"

"Truly spoken," answered Netokris without change of expression. "Even now it was in my mind to keep you both near to me."

Menni's expression had changed, but he had gone too far to back down. He glanced at Berenice—unable to keep the longing and the tenderness out of it even had he wished—then back at the queen.

"Together?"

The question was involuntary—voiced the fear uppermost in his mind.

"Soon, my impatient bridegroom," Netokris answered. "I fear that you can't be spared for a few days yet from the great work that demands your time and attention just now. In the meantime, rest assured that your Berenice will remain the ward of the Isis."

There was an undertone in the softly spoken words that made Menni's blood run cold. He would have spoken—checked himself as he felt some sort of a blasphemous protest springing to his lips.

It wasn't his fault if he forgot that this was a goddess in whose presence he was. Such an attitude toward her had never been instinctive with him, anyway.

Now, the feeling of reverence which should have been his had disappeared almost completely. Despite his volition to think otherwise, his heart was clamoring the truth that he was in the presence of a wicked and revengful woman.

He wasn't prepared for the thing which followed. No man is ever prepared for some of the things that a woman may do.

Netokris had turned to Berenice, had smiled upon her.

"Come," she whispered softly—"come sit at the side of your lord. Don't be so shy. There is none to notice save the slaves, who are as animals, and I, the Isis."

Berenice flushed at the reference to the slaves. Her own period of bond-

age, sweet as it had been, was still too recent and real to make the remark of Netokris anything else than a veiled insult. Flushing, she hesitated. But she had received an order.

With all the gentle timidity of her virgin heart she rose from where she sat, went over to a place between Menni and the queen.

"Put your arm about her, my lord-governor," said Netokris.

Menni obeyed.

His heart was pounding, but his chin was high. As the delicate form of Berenice wilted against him, as there rose to his face the delicate, natural odor of her glorious hair, he felt as though he could have defied every god and goddess in the universe.

His arm encircled her, strong and unflinching. Ammon only knows what the feel of it must have been to the shrinking, bashful, frightened girl.

"Kiss her," hissed the queen with an odd mingling of agony and exultation in her savage face.

Berenice's body was shaken with a slight tremor. Menni noticed it—that and how she shrunk yet a little closer to him.

"Yea, and gladly," he said stoutly.

"Kiss her," Netokris repeated, "then go and leave us. Fear not. She is the ward of Isis!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"WHEN OSIRIS MOVES.

PREPARATIONS were going ahead rapidly for the great banquet which Netokris herself had announced to Menni that day she had given him the famous sapphire known as the "Tear of God Ra." Menni himself was in charge of the principal feature of the preparations—the final decoration of the great, underground treasure-palace imagined and begun by the murdered Metemsa. It was here, as the queen suggested, that the banquet was to be held.

But this was only one detail of the several which seemed destined to make this occasion one of the most notable in the history of the Double Kingdom.

It was to be more than a mere celebration of the queen's ascension to the Double Throne, for it was pretty generally understood that on this day she would select some one to share the throne with her. The possibilities of the situation were of a kind to bring every educated man and woman in the empire to an agony of suspense. Not since old King Menes was killed by a hippopotamus had the land of Egypt faced such a crisis.

First, that palace conspiracy which had resulted in the death of Metemsa; the accession of the queen under the powerful domination of Kashta; the tragic death of Kashta; the widespread feeling in the air that the rich and powerful priests would not long delay in putting forth a candidate of their own for the throne.

Even the hod-carriers knew it—unless Netokris selected a man of power, and soon, her dynasty was doomed.

Who would it be?

Feverish expectancy among the courtiers, jealousies, watchful suspicion day and night, more than one of them conscious of the ever-present angel of sudden death, yet each afraid to flee, secretly hopeful that he was to be the elect of the queen, that it was the others who should feel the touch of the skeleton-hand.

For that the first act of the new consort of the Isis of the Double Throne would be the riddance of his coconspirators was as good as certain.

When Osiris moves!

That was to be the fateful hour when the queen would announce her decision. It had been many a year since such a phenomenon had been resorted to—when some mighty statue of the god had raised a granite arm or bowed his granite head as a signal that some long-awaited hour had come in the destiny of the nation. But the tradition of such things was still strong in the heart of the people of every class.

There were scoffers, to be sure—atheists who claimed that such a thing could not occur except by the trickery of the priests. There were such atheists among the princes themselves; but that did not relieve the approaching decision from many of its tremendous possibilities.

Osiris *would* move—whether by trickery or through the potent interposition of the god himself—every one was sure of that.

And even the most careless and indifferent could see that of late some deep change had come over the spirit of the queen. It had been marked, especially since that night she had ordered the arrest of her governor, Menni. It was almost as though she had taken to heart the reported marriage of Menni to that yellow-haired slave of old Nefru, the girl Berenice.

And yet it couldn't be this. There was Menni back in the palace at his old tasks, apparently higher in favor than ever. And even if he had married Berenice, that could have been a matter of small import to Netokris. There was not a marriage in heaven or on earth that she couldn't dissolve by the merest smile and a word. Yes, Menni was still a man to be reckoned with. His name also, most likely, would be found on the list "when Osiris moved."

As a matter of fact, there was a deeper motive for that change which had certainly appeared in the character of the queen.

There were even moments when she wished that she had the old Kashta again there to give her advice—that she had not slain the sacred serpent. Fear, an entirely new sensation, so far as Netokris was concerned—and, at first, not an entirely unpleasant one—had crept, like the spirit-double of the snake itself, into her heart. She had destroyed her old gods. The new were strangers to her—though she herself was reckoned as one of them and the greatest. She was confronted by things that she couldn't understand, and yet she could turn to no one but herself.

There was that odd, astounding, sacrilegious prophecy which Baknik had delivered. But even that did not disquiet her spirit so much as the apparently simple thing that followed.

She had warned the palace-guard to prevent Baknik from leaving. Not only was the order instantly carried out, so far as human powers were concerned—gates and walls both watched, every one who came and went closely scrutinized, the palace itself painstakingly searched—but his house and the pyramid of Menkaura had also been subjected to unremitting surveillance.

Baknik had not been found. Baknik had disappeared.

Fear, delightful at times, grisly at others, was seldom absent from the queen's thought now. It wasn't fear of death. It was fear of the things she couldn't understand.

There was that affair of Baknik. Equally incomprehensible was the affair of the girl Berenice.

Even while Baknik had been speaking on that morning that she had brought Berenice and Menni to the palace, she had conceived the—to her—infinitely pleasing project of having Berenice whipped to death. She hadn't done so. Up to the present she had been unable to do more than keep the girl aloof—a prisoner, but not otherwise mistreated—along with the other women of the palace.

And that edict which she herself had issued—"when Osiris moved."

At first it had been but a mocking allusion to the great statue of Osiris in the underground treasure-palace—the statue so arranged that it would swing out and permit the waters of the Nile to rush in and submerge the place, thus drowning every one who remained there. The plan was still in her thought, but she was gradually aware that even this had passed beyond her volition.

It was as though the god Horus—he who clipped eternity into pieces and thus invented time—as though Horus himself had selected this hour for the ending of everything that was.

It was under the domination of this deepening mood of fear, of yearning, of baffled will, that Netokris once more sent for the governor of her palace.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NETOKRIS PROPOSES A BARGAIN.

"You look pale," she said softly—"pale and gloomy. That isn't the way that a loyal believer and faithful subject should come into the presence of his immortal queen. Say so and I'll call the musicians and the jugglers, give you some good old wine."

She was laughing at him, though Menni could see that her mood was no gayer than his own. He had prostrated himself, but at a motion of the queen's hand had risen again to his feet. During the past week, with scarcely a word of any kind concerning the fate of Berenice, he had been unable to sleep, and his face showed it.

Netokris half sat, half reclined on a sort of high throne or couch covered with a lion skin. As usual she was but scantily clad, had been at particular pains with her toilet—toes, fingers, lips all stained the same bright pink, her eyes darkened and elongated beyond the line of her straight fine brows. Her short, thick, heavy blue-black hair was cunningly coifed with bands of finely woven gold from which, over her left ear, there hung a cluster of blue-lotus buds. Even at that distance the air was permeated with the delicate, disquieting perfume she used.

Menni looked at her in silence, but his gray eyes rendered the use of words unnecessary. They told the queen everything.

"Poor Menni! Come, sit beside me. You appear so tired—tired with watching and waiting. Come, sit here beside me. Your Berenice won't mind."

"It is true, then—"

"That she lives and is perfectly happy. What greater proof could you have of my—of my—"

She completed the phrase by running her painted finger-tips through his hair as she reached out and encircled his head with a sinuous arm.

Still Menni didn't dare to trust himself to speech. Berenice safe—that was the big fact—but the arm closed tighter about his head like the coil of a serpent.

"I have shown myself magnanimous on your account," Netokris went on. "Can't you show yourself magnanimous on mine?"

"How?"

"How! By thrilling a little at my touch. Not a prince of Egypt but would give his eyes for this."

"But I—I am grateful," Menni managed to articulate.

"Grateful," Netokris sneered with mocking cruelty—"it isn't gratitude I want."

Another convulsive contraction of her arm about his head. It was too hard for him to speak. He gave up the effort.

"Is it so hard," she asked, "to love me just a little? Listen! When we were together over there that first night in the pyramid I swore to myself that I would never mention it again. I am Netokris—Isis—she who holds the two kingdoms together. But"—her voice sank low—"but I am a woman. I am young. I am beautiful. Why can't you love me, just a little bit?"

"I do, when you're kind. I am loyal, faithful—"

"Oh, not that. I am sick of loyalty, sick of faithfulness. I despise them. Be a traitor, a thief, an idolator, if you will. But love me, thrill to my touch!"

"I would, but—"

"Not but—not would! Aren't you a man? Don't you know what I offer you? Do you attach more importance to the words of that fish-blooded Baknik than you do to mine?"

"It is not his words or yours, O Netokris. You ask that which is impossible."

"How, impossible? I'm a woman. You're a man. Forget everything except that—as the gods do when they make us."

"I cannot!"

"Cannot!"

Her stormy nature, like the wind at the center of a hurricane, was whirling from north to south, from a passion of love and self-sacrifice to a passion of hate. Almost without interval the hand that had been caressing him dug its nails into his face.

The movement roused him to action. In a moment he had seized both of her wrists, was holding them tight, had straightened up, was staring at her with unflinching eyes.

"Let go of me," she panted, struggling. "Let go of me, or, by the gods I'll have you torn to pieces, and that slave-wench of yours as well!"

Even as the words poured from her lips she remembered the order she had given that no one should approach under pain of death the place where they were. She would hardly have called out, even if there had been some one there to hear her. Her eyes had narrowed. Her face had gone white.

"I'll kill you both—dogs, jackals!"

"Oh, no, you won't," said Menni, unconsciously quoting the words of the only other man who had ever dared defy her.

His grip had tightened. He had brought Netokris to impotence.

He barely whispered the words: "What if I should kill you, Netokris!"

"Woman-fighter!"

She spat the epithet at him, looking more like a beautiful, enraged serpent than ever.

He merely smiled, as his eyes took on a fresh glint of hard brightness.

"There is nothing to keep me from doing so," he went on. "I have nothing to lose. I know that my hour is almost near. I know that Berenice will die. Life and love are already on the altar. All that is left is my hatred of you."

He had been so engrossed in the spectacle summoned up by things he had spoken that he was unprepared for the next change that swept over the woman in front of him.

A gust of tears!

Netokris, who united the two countries, Queen of the Diadem of the Vulture and the Snake of abiding splendor, the golden Horus in woman's form, soul of the gods—weeping, her slender wrists imprisoned in his brawny fists!

A moment and Menni had slipped to the floor, was kneeling with bowed head.

"Call your guard," he said.

A long interval of silence, then Netokris whispered: "You could have slain me."

"Not when you wept," he answered, looking up, but still on one knee.

He knew that the interview was not ended. He felt safer there in that position—safer with Netokris as a goddess than with Netokris as a woman.

The queen, her mood somewhat calmed by that last, tumultuous outburst—the first time in her life, so far as she could remember, that she had ever shed any tears at all—was evidently thinking hard.

"You could have killed me, but you didn't," she resumed, almost placidly, after an interval. "I could have you and the girl killed now, but I won't. After all, death is such a puny, insignificant thing! I have killed. It never brought me more than momentary satisfaction."

Again she took thought, while Menni waited.

"Listen! It may all be just as that priest of yours has said, that death, even now, is waiting on all of us. But I know more than that. I know that you and I are the arbiters—you and I, even though you have refused until now to share the opportunity I offer you. There is still time.

"My palace is filled with those who want me to place them in Metemsa's place—who suffocate me with their flattery, take away my appetite with their lovesick looks. I'll murder them all—I'll murder them all, and you and myself and Berenice—do you hear?"

"I hear."

"You know that I speak the truth?"

"I know you speak the truth."

"The night of the Tear-Drop of Isis draws near. Already I have dissolved that wedding of yours. Whether the priests want it or not, I am Isis, and that maiden of yours will feed her young body to the crocodiles of Father Nile. You know—warm night, plenty of music, every one drunk—every one, that is, except that white-faced girl who stands on the bank waiting for the water to touch her feet—"

"I know."

"All this—and your death and mine. On the other hand, you and I ruling generous Egypt for many a fat year to come. Even these sleek princes of ours at work to increase our dominions: that pale girl forgiven, forgotten and happy!

"What do we care for prophecies!

"I tell you that we are the arbiters. Not we, but you alone. Decide!"

"When?"

"Show me the ring."

Menni held out his hand. On the finger where Netokris had placed it there still gleamed the fathomless blue of the great sapphire—the one tear shed by the God Ra when sin first appeared on earth.

"We hold our banquet on that night—the night of the Tear-Drop of Isis," said Netokris. "If, at that banquet, you give me back this pledge."

CHAPTER XXV.

MENNI WRITES A MESSAGE.

THERE comes a time in the life of every man when he has to decide a thing for himself—when he is confronted by a problem not stated in any text-book, the answer to which can't be given him by any friend, however wise and true. Take a man who is unhappily married, for example. Or, take a man in Menni's case.

Never had he felt so solitary, yet never so much in need of counsel and support, as when he crossed the garden, after that momentous interview, toward the temple of Ptah under which lay the new treasure-palace.

He felt that he was stared at by the guards, the courtiers, even the slaves, as he walked along.

He had always been more or less the man of mystery, as every man is who has achieved high place in early youth. At first, immediately after the night that Ennana had gone forth to seek him, there had been a slight falling off of his authority. But he had it back again now, stronger than ever.

Not only was he evidently very close to his sovereign. More than that, even, was the feeling he cast about him that here was a man who walked and talked on equal terms with the gods of life and death.

Ennana had gone out against him with the tremendous weapon of a warrant from the Pharaoh. It was Ennana who died.

Now, had Menni been the Pharaoh himself—as, indeed, some day soon he might be, if there was anything in palace-gossip—he could not have been hedged about by more respect.

This very aloofness of those with whom he might have talked in former times increased Menni's feeling of solitude.

No one to give him advice; no maxim—even in the writings of the godlike Hermes—to enlighten him.

He passed on down the long corridors and lamp-lighted steps to the underground treasure-palace. Even the gilders and painters had completed their work. The vast hall was aglimmer with light and color as a hundred other artificers mounted and tested copper flambeaus and swinging lamps.

Against each wall, more striking than ever in their chaste nudity contrasted with the richly decorated background, stood the mammoth statues of Isis and Osiris. One of them could move—would move, unless Menni did as the queen wished him to—and let the torrent of the Nile rush in.

Wholesale death if he clung to Berenice! And this the instrument of it.

No wonder the place made him feel sick.

He waved away the overseers who had hastened forward at sight of him, and once more made his way up to the open air, resolved to make one more effort to find Berenice and escape with her.

Ever since he had come to live in the palace he had insisted on the utmost simplicity, in spite of his high station. He had nothing in him of the sybarite.

Apart from the slaves usually attached to his person, he had only one servant to whom he had ever accorded the familiarity of his full confidence—an old man he had owned since boyhood, a Macedonian named Naktmout. Perhaps it wouldn't be such a bad idea to seek even Naktmout's advice. The man was old. And he was enough of an imbecile—so Menni told himself—to be oracular.

Thought of him gave something of an impulse to the governor's thought-heavy heels. He reached his apartments in the southwestern corner of the Double Palace—a series of rooms opening on a small courtyard sacred to himself—searched them through, called.

Naktmout was not there.

Menni made inquiries. All that he could learn was that the old slave had been summoned away an hour or so before by a messenger from the Pharaoh and had not appeared again. The thing increased his anger. It was so petty—to increase his isolation by robbing him of an old and faithful slave.

For a while he walked about the courtyard wrapped in sullen brooding. He thought of what Baknik had prophesied—that he and Berenice would both meet their end in the waters of the Nile, that Netokris herself was soon to die; recalled what Netokris had said about certain men being arbiters of their destinies despite all prophecies, despite even the edicts of fate.

This train of thought once more set the blood to tingling through his veins. That very morning he had used force upon Netokris. He still lived.

One more try!

He went into his apartments and took from its place among the other insignia of his rank a short and heavy scourge—an ornate cat-o'-nine-tails, emblem of the royal power vested in him. Several times there had come to him the fantastic dream of a palace-revolution. It had all seemed very remote. Now he was going to try to carry it out.

In the long and stablelike barracks that occupied one entire side of the palace enclosure, there was a company of Macedonians—captives, for they had been taken in battle; yet not precisely slaves, for they had been put on the same footing as the other mercenaries. The captain of this company was himself a Macedonian—taller than most Egyptians, lean, blue-eyed, light-haired.

It was the heat of the day, and most of those officers and men who were not on duty were asleep. But it was different with the Macedonian company, the majority of whom were busy, under a striped awning mounted in front of their quarters, either at games or in polishing and sharpening their simple weapons.

There was swift silence, not so much of consternation as of friendly admiration, when the governor appeared. The Macedonians clung with pride to the tradition that the governor himself was of their stock.

"Your captain, Kalthos?" asked Menni softly.

A dozen men had sprung up to do his bidding, and in a moment Kalthos himself appeared, his peculiarly shaped bronze helmet in place and his striped loin-cloth as orderly as though he had been expecting the distinguished visitor. Nor did he show any surprise or nervousness in his grave and respectful salute. He was every inch the soldier, was Kalthos—perhaps himself a progenitor of the Ptolemies.

"Kalthos, I have things of importance to say to you."

"If my lord will accept a soldier's hospitality."

The captain of the Macedonian company had at his disposal a small, white room, monastic in its simplicity and cleanliness. A stool, a wooden couch, a table on which were various pieces of papyrus, brushes, and paints.

"You write?" cried Menni in surprise.

"But a few simple signs, as yet," the soldier answered modestly.

"Continue," said Menni, with an accent of enthusiasm, then fell to musing. "I also write somewhat," he went on after an interval. "Let me show you."

As the governor of the Double Palace seated himself at the table and took up the brushes Kalthos stood at attention, his eyes fixed on the wall in front of him. It was not for him to watch the artistic struggles of his superior until commanded to do so.

Menni wrote very large—that is, he drew his hieroglyphics very large. Had he not done so there would have been difficulty, perhaps, in distinguishing between the falcon and the owl, the crook and the scourge, the water-line and the serpent.

Finally, after an interval during which the unflinching eyes of the soldier had followed the shadow of the sun a full three-fingers' breadth across the wall, Menni turned and held up the still moist papyrus, the gravity of his face softened somewhat with humor and pride.

"How's that?"

"Written like a priest," Kalthos replied with sincerity, as his blue eyes lit up.

"And to a priest," the governor answered. "Can you read it?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THROUGH DARK HALLS.

For an interval Kalthos looked at the pictured page his chief was holding up, and he forgot enough of his military spirit to flush a little and smile.

"It is beautifully written," he commented again; "but, you see, I'm an ignorant brute; nothing but a soldier." Then, with a gleam of delighted recognition: "It's to the Pharaoh."

"Yes, but to which one?"

The question was put in a whisper that brought a thrill into the captain's voice, as he answered softly:

"I recognize not the seal."

"Of Baknik, the high priest," said Menni. "Listen while I read:

> "To Baknik, Pharaoh, Horus, and Osiris, from his friend Menni, who is about to die, this present is borne by Kalthos, Macedonian, a true man, commander of all the troops of the Double Kingdom."

Kalthos was trembling slightly, but he had become the soldier again. His eyes had left the papyrus, were once again fixed on the wall in front of him. But it required no physiognomist to see that he was listening with all his ears.

"You have heard what I have written," said Menni softly but steadily. "I sha'n't discuss it with you. You are to take this thing and keep it by you. When the things happen that are likely to happen, it will be your commission to a great career. I have written it because I am about to command you and your men to dangerous work."

Night had fallen over the Double Palace—a night of purple velvet studded with stars that flamed as large and bright as the lamps and torches of the palace itself—when Prince Tentares, honorary commander of the royal barge, made his way toward the landing-stage. It was a highly coveted post held each succeeding week by a different prince of the blood.

Tentares, fat, already the none too worthy husband of half a dozen wives, was, nevertheless, a suitor also for the hand of the widowed queen.

He was mellow with wine, speculated longingly on the prospect of her majesty crossing the lake that night.

Ah, by Typhon! if he only had some sort of magic crowbar to make Osiris move and indicate himself.

He had entered a rose-lined path leading over the embankment—but recently strengthened in view of the approaching period of the annual flood—had started to hum a little tune, when his head was suddenly enveloped in a stout linen sheet.

Two minutes later, while he was still struggling for comprehension, he found himself bound and gagged and lying in darkness on a bed of mud amid villainous odors.

Two shadowy forms, as naked, silent, and lithe as wild animals, slipped along the bank from where they had left the outraged prince, and in a moment or two were again in the vicinity of the rose-lined path.

"All well," they whispered in the Macedonian dialect to their captain, Kalthos.

Kalthos merely answered by a gesture, cast a quick glance at the stars.

"Well-timed," he meditated.

The ease with which this first step had been accomplished gave him melancholy encouragement. But it would be another matter to fall upon the retinue of the Isis, to secure the person of the queen herself, even though the fight be limited to the decks of the royal barge. He was no coward, but he hoped that it would not be necessary, that the queen would remain in the palace that night, that it would be Menni himself who appeared in company with the one they were sworn to carry off to safety.

The night wore on. Slowly, majestically the great constellations swung along their appointed arcs.

Peace and calm!

There came no sounds that one might not have heard on any night—the tremendous chorus of frogs and insects with an occasional note of grosser sound as a fish jumped and fell with a splash in the smoothly flowing waters, or somewhere, far away, a sacred crocodile bellowed defiance to a rival; from the palace and the palace gardens an intermittent lilt of faint music and far laughter, an occasional cry from a princely roisterer or a beaten slave.

As soon as it was dark Menni, armed with a dagger, but placing more dependence still in his official scourge and his desperate resolution, had quickly crossed the expanse of the palace toward the quarter where he knew that Berenice was being held.

He was prepared for anything. It would either be flight or, once again, a palace revolution — the deposed queen held captive on her barge, he himself the military dictator until the new Pharaoh was seated on the Double Throne.

His destination lay beyond the building set apart as the royal residence—this a small palace in itself, an armed camp at all times, occupying almost a fourth of the walled royal city.

He was in no mood for roundabout methods.

He entered the peristyle of the palace of the queen, was confronted by Prince Saites, honorary commander of the bodyguard.

"Your pleasure, my lord?" asked the prince.

Saites was a sallow-faced son of the Lower Kingdom — slightly concaved face, melancholy brown eyes full of suspicion and deceit. He had never loved the governor, any more than the governor had ever loved him. Their very natures were inimical.

For several seconds Menni regarded him with piercing eyes and a contemptuous smile. Then he leaned forward.

"Tell me," he whispered, "first what you did with the dagger you used on Metemsa, regicide!"

The prince's face became a trifle more sallow. The blight of fear came into his melancholy eyes.

"I may pass this way again," said Menni meaningly, and was on his way.

He passed through dusky halls and corridors. It made him tremble a little, despite the desperate courage of his

mood, to think how close he was to the person of the queen.

He passed perhaps a hundred men and women—underlings, for the most part; or, at least, those who, while high in rank, lacked the courage or the authority to stop or question him.

He neither tarried nor looked back—showing, perhaps, that however intent a man may be on his purpose, however strong his will, he is still held and guided by the reins of Fate.

He had crossed a wide courtyard perfumed and shadowy with bower after bower of rare, imported flowers—roses from Persia, orchids and flowering palms from the forests beyond the cataracts—and had come to the hall of the eunuchs, presided over by the chamberlain Kovo, a powerful man both as to physique and cunning, whom Kashta had brought from Meroe.

Like so many others whom Kashta had brought with him from the south and placed in power, Kovo also was accredited with magical powers—a reputation not altogether without foundation, perhaps.

He also had blocked Menni's progress with a polite question. Menni was tall, but Kovo was taller. A full seven feet he stood, though as thin as he was black. They made a peculiar contrast standing there—Menni so stalwart and fair, Kovo so grotesquely tall, thin, and black, a burned pine of a man.

"I come to seek the Lady Berenice," said Menni boldly. "Fear nothing from her who crushed the head of your sacred serpent."

Kovo's eyes were as small, as black and as inscrutable as those of a raccoon. For a space he gazed back into the gray eyes of the governor of the palace, as though not comprehending.

"*Nothing to fear from her who had crushed the head of the sacred serpent!*"

It was incredible, too hideous!

Still, he was thinking rapidly. It is true that he had been assailed by weird, unspeakable misgivings ever since the murder of Kashta. That it had been murder, and not suicide, he was convinced. Had so great a magician as Kashta wished to die he would have accomplished it by merely willing himself to die, not by the crude method of stabbing himself with a poisoned dagger.

"The lady Berenice!" he exclaimed. "She is not here, my lord—at least, not under that name."

"I'll search."

"Yea, search, my lord."

Kovo summoned two of his attendants, spoke to them rapidly in the language of Ethiopia. They salaamed deeply to the governor, started ahead of him toward the depths of the hall.

Scarcely had Menni's back been turned than Kovo had disappeared—was fleeing like a black, disarticulate shadow across the flowering courtyard toward the apartments of the queen.

CHAPTER XXVII.

BEHIND THE VEIL.

ALREADY apprised by one of her ladies-in-waiting that the governor had passed that way, Netokris was not surprised to receive a visit from her chief chamberlain, to hear what he had to tell.

If she had not been so absorbed in her own thought she would have noticed perhaps the peculiar expression in those black and scintillant eyes, which never left her while Kovo was speaking to her.

Was it possible, he wondered, that this woman in front of him had actually slain the sacred serpent? Wicked, passionate, indifferent to everything but her own desires—so he read her beautiful face—she would be capable of such a thing. He would have to make sure. For was she not to some extent the heiress of Kashta to the sacred hierarchy?

"There is no danger that he discover the girl?"

"None whatsoever, O Isis!"

"Are you sure of your men?"

"Absolutely sure. Even now I spoke to them in the language of Meroe. The secret chamber where the Lady Berenice now lies does not exist save to my vile knowledge and your divine intelligence, O goddess of the Double Tiara!"

Netokris was thinking — bright-eyed, preoccupied. Suddenly she let out a little exclamation of joy.

"Go seek the governor quickly," she said, in low, exultant tones; "tell him that you have discovered her whom he seeks; that she stands under the fig-tree by the second fountain in the courtyard."

Kovo, who had remained kneeling since the interview began, was about to bring his forehead again to the floor as a token that he understood.

"Stay!" the queen cried almost joyfully. "Stay—there is something else!"

In the mean time Menni had been making the most of his opportunity, driven at once by growing desperation and growing desire—now that the object of his quest seemed to be so close at hand.

He had passed through a series of heavy triple curtains at the end of the hall, found himself in a still larger apartment beyond — twilit and slumberous, air heavily perfumed, a dim impression of recumbent forms; from a far corner a greater radiance, a soft babble of voices and tinkling music.

Menni paused, half suffocated with emotion. Thus far his hardihood had brought him probably farther than any other man had penetrated in the history of Egypt — unless he were invader or poltroon. But it was too late for hesitation. He brushed his two guides aside, and strode boldly forward.

A surge of half-suppressed giggles and explanations, a wave of fright, feigned or real; the crash of a harp overturned on the stone floor.

Women plain and beautiful, old and young—the majority of them beautiful and young—at least, so they appeared to the panicky eyes of the young governor.

But no Berenice!

Hold—there was a Berenice! Some one had pointed to a cowering, shadowy form on a low divan in a corner of the room.

With legs that trembled under him, Menni hastened over for a closer look. Liquid-brown eyes that looked up at him through the semidarkness like pools of yearning. But this was not the Berenice he sought.

He had mounted to the upper floor where the sleeping apartments were; was passing from one to the other with tortured expectancy yet ever-declining hope, when a young slave-girl —her eyes brilliant under her tattooed forehead, her tattooed breasts heaving with the breathless haste she had made —caught up with him.

"My lord! My lord! She whom you seek is waiting for you now—just there, outside in the courtyard, under the fig-tree by the side of the second fountain."

"Are you certain?"

It required but a single glance into that inflamed face, however, to tell Menni that the girl was certain. She was aquiver with the excitement and the joy of it. To speed a lover to the arms of his beloved has always been a joy to women of whatever age and of whatever caste.

Berenice—the Berenice whom Menni sought — had been awakened from a troubled dream by the chamberlain, Kovo. He had been her only link with the outside world since her wedding-day. It had been a period of nightmare here in this dungeonlike room, relieved only by her persistent faith that sooner or later her husband-hero would seek her out, resume the glittering romance that had ended while still but scarcely begun.

She was still convinced to some extent that there had been a mistake; that the great and good Netokris had

been misled; that it was but a question of time when the mistake would be cleared up.

"You are to come with me," said Kovo.

"Where? Menni — will he be there?"

"You are to see him," the chamberlain replied.

There was something so terribly grim in his fashion of saying it that Berenice clasped a hand to her heart.

"He is not dead?"

"No, he is not dead. But you are not to make a sound."

They were of a different race. Kovo had been reared in a hard and terrible school. Ordinarily, he was as indifferent to the spectacle of human suffering as most people would be to the tortured rock under the chisel of the mason. But there was something in the spectacle of this white-faced girl that touched even his atrophied heart.

"If you make a sound," he warned in all kindness, "I am to kill you."

In silence, quivering with expectancy, her hopes battling her fears, Berenice had followed her gaunt and sable guide to an open window overlooking a courtyard. Not far away was a fountain, at the side of which stood a low, wide-spreading fig-tree.

In the shadow of this tree—yet perfectly distinct in the blue translucence of the night — she saw a veiled and graceful form. A young woman evidently. She must have been beautiful.

There came a sound of hurrying footsteps, a low cry which was vibrant with passionate devotion.

It was Menni.

As through a veil—a black veil that strangled her — Berenice saw Menni leap forward and seize the stranger in his arms.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE NIGHT OF NIGHTS.

BOUND tighter than ever by the invisible chains that were dragging him on to his appointed hour, Menni had given up thought of further revolt. He was not discouraged, not yet even greatly downcast.

After a first outburst of bitterness and rage at the discovery of the trick that the queen had played upon him, he had attained a feeling of dispassionate calm that he felt would never again be shaken either by grief or by joy.

This feeling was largely due, no doubt, to the fact that his friend, the mystical and highly developed Baknik, had taken to visiting him in his dreams. In these dreams they had talked together—Baknik had described and Menni had recognized the inevitable.

In the waters of the Nile he and Berenice were to die together; but over and over again the high priest of the Pyramid of Menkaura had repeated that this would not be the end of things; that death never was.

That Berenice had been set apart as the "bride of the Nile" Menni also knew. In this way he had come to look upon "The Night of the Tear-Drop of Isis"—the first night of the season of Sha, when the inundation began—as the date upon which he and his virgin bride should begin their journey into the unknown.

Still, four nights away. Still, four days and nights of life.

Some whim of Netokris had caused her to advance the date of her projected banquet in the underground treasure-house — perhaps with an idea of herself being free to witness the death of her earthly rival in case Menni should persist in his purpose to flaunt her to the end.

Even now, as he recalled the scene under the fig-tree, his pulse quickened; there was a contraction about his throat. He could have laughed or cursed with equal ease.

"No wonder," he reflected, "that the queen was already known among the mercenaries and other non-believers in the empire by the name of

that legendary courtesan, Rhodopis. As such, may she go down to posterity!"

He was arraying himself for the banquet. He had had his daily bath. The barber had just left him freshly shaven. He had even had the barber shave his head after the fashion of the priests.

A good thing, he meditated, for he was soon to appear in the presence of the gods, anyway.

Over his shaven crown he had fitted a massive wig, the tightly curled hair of which descended to his shoulders.

A gold collar—almost a cape of finely linked gold beads and pendants—rested comfortably on his bare shoulders. His loin-cloth, skirt, and tunic were of the finest linen to be procured in the empire.

As he looked at himself in the square mirror of polished alloy, he felt a pang of melancholy regret that Berenice could not see him now.

Then, summoning the litter which he rarely used, he ordered the slaves to carry him to the temple of Ptah, under which lay the vast banquet-hall.

Brief as the distance was, the gold of sunset which still lingered in the air had "run off into the darkness" by the time that the slaves had completed their leisurely course.

For a space of a hundred yards or so round the temple of Ptah an extra force of palace guards were on duty to keep back the uninvited and curious. There were many such, for fame of the affair had spread up and down the Double Kingdom.

Memphis was filling fast, anyway, for the great festival which always marked the beginning of the annual flood. And every one in the city that night who could secure admission to the Double Palace had done so—merchants, landed proprietors, small princes, an extraordinarily large number of priests.

It was almost as though that long-predicted revolution — predicted in whispers for almost a century now—when the priests were to place one of their own number on the double throne was about to be put through.

A thousand flaring torches, about which scarabs and moths persisted in singeing their sacred wings.

The shifting, soft-spoken multitude of the well-dressed and the well-to-do.

Whispered remarks, not always flattery, concerning those who were admitted to the charmed circle drawn by the silent, grim, and foreign-looking guards.

There was a ripple of merriment when Prince Tentares appeared in his litter—so fat, so oiled and perspiring, that the paint about his eyes was already beginning to run. Furthermore, the gossips had been at work; and even those who had not previously heard the story of how, a few nights before, he had been waylaid within the palace itself, trussed up like a goose and tossed into the mire, were hearing it now.

There was a silence that spelled dislike when the melancholy Saites was borne in. There were ugly rumors concerning him which even the gossips did not care to repeat except "from mouth to ear"—that he had been the leader of the palace cabal which had put an end to the days of the young Metemsa.

The princes Seti, Amasis, Aï followed.

The public let not one of them pass without close scrutiny; for was not one of these to be selected—that very night, most likely—to occupy the other half of the double throne?

A whisper of greater curiosity still ran about as Menni appeared; he was so cool, so indifferent, and one of the last, despite the fact that he was not, like the others, one of the hereditary monarchs of the empire.

Surely, a man of mystery as well as of power; as any one could tell by looking into that calm, dignified, sorrowful, yet proud face of his.

Menni's fame had likewise spread up and down the Nile from Delta to Cataract, not only as the builder of the sub-

terranean palace—as the man who had held back the waters of the Nile by pressure of the air—but also as the favorite of the Isis on earth.

The whisper of commendation had become almost a cheer—a sort of wordless surge of envy, admiration, goodwill.

Menni had paid no attention, as became a man in his position; had looked neither to the right nor the left; had stepped from his litter and entered the painted peristyle of the temple of Ptah.

He stood there hesitant for a moment, immersed in sudden recollection of the last time that he had gone into such a temple to worship.

It was the day of his wedding to Berenice—over there under the pale-blue shadow of the Pyramid of Menkaura at dawn.

What changes since then!

A quick glance round. No one, except the slaves who had brought him here, was close enough to follow his actions. No matter if any one did, anyway.

A little later he was standing in the depth of the temple with his eyes on the massive, graven face of the world-maker.

This was the night of nights when he should decide not only his own fate, but the fate of the girl he loved, of all the other men of power and riches and fame who were even then assembling in the great banquet-hall far below the place where he then was standing.

Should he waver? Could he waver? He looked up into the face of the god for an answer.

As on that other occasion, the graven figure seemed to have taken on a look of kindliness and comprehension. Yet, it was still the face of a god—of one who looks with patience into the uttermost depths of eternity and finds that all is good.

For a moment Menni let his eyes fall to his extended hand, upon which glimmered the sapphire which Netokris had given him. He looked at it as though reading therein the grief of the father of all gods when sin first appeared on earth.

Then Menni again lifted his eyes to the face of old Ptah. It seemed to him that this time he and the god had a bond of sympathy between them which had never existed before.

The governor of the Double Palace smiled.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"DRINK TO RAPTURE."

It was more gorgeous than it had ever appeared before, that strangest banquet-hall ever designed by man; for, after the artificers had completed the lighting arrangements, drapers, furniture-makers, and florists had all vied with each other in making the place complete.

The throne-dais occupied one end of the enormous room—a voluptuous conception of yellow, black, and green, lion skins, giraffe and zebra skins, a section of orchid-grown jungle to left and right, a soaring canopy of rich-green cloth—and in the center of this a golden throne with a golden table in front of it.

It was here that Netokris was to sit.

There was an individual table and an individual chair for each of the guests — some of hemlock and gold, others of ivory and ebony.

The entire floor of the hall was richly carpeted. In addition to this, under each chair and table the skins of other jungle beasts were spread.

Up in front of the dais there was even the carefully tanned hide of a gigantic elephant, and it was on this that much of the dancing, jugglery, and tumbling would take place; perhaps even a duel or two, for Netokris was notoriously fond of bloodshed—and, as some of the attendants themselves remarked, the elephant-skin could be rapidly washed in case of accident.

Along each side of the hall the cun-

ning florists had reared fragrant bowers of foliage and blossoms, behind which the servants could come and go without being too much in evidence.

Two groups of musicians—one of men and the other of women, forty or fifty of each—were posted to left and to right at the end of the room where the dais was. It was curious to remark the difference when one group left off and the other began. A stronger cadence, and a greater exactitude and more power from the flutes and harps when the men were playing; a lighter touch, but with a more emotional and exciting swirl of sound when the women played.

At stated intervals—in response to some signal of their own, no doubt—there would be a moment of sharp silence; then men and women would both be playing an accompaniment to a hidden chorus of singing *almahs*.

There was no waiting for the festivities to begin.

Each guest, immediately upon his arrival, was greeted as though the banquet were all his own. Fresh lotus-blossoms were hung about his neck; he was led to the place previously assigned to him, while the dancing-girls' most famous throughout the empire for their grace and beauty surrounded him, entertained him, while he made his wishes known.

Comfortably seated before his table—previously assigned to him in strict accordance to his rank—a murmured request, and, while he was still looking about him with wonder, a crystal goblet was before him filled with whatever he most loved to drink—famous beers, rare wines.

"Drink to rapture!"

It became a rising chorus as each succeeding guest arrived; for already it was apparent that there would be those present that night who would be more interested in their crystal goblets than they would be in the painted plates.

The tables were filling fast when Menni arrived. His own place was well forward; but before advancing into the hall he stood long where he was, at the foot of the stairs down which he had come, gazing on all he saw with barely concealed emotion.

The dais of the Isis—so different from the Isis represented in the granite on the four sides of the chamber—so lofty, chaste, and cold.

And there were the four colossal effigies of Osiris, one of which could swing from its place and let into this place the anodyne waters of Father Nile.

Would the queen fulfil her threat—use this very night to slay those who had slain Metemsa—unless he—

Menni gazed down once more at the sapphire ring.

She would be capable of it.

And all these slaves — the singers, the dancers, the musicians, the athletes, the cup-bearers! Would she be ready to sacrifice all these as well?

She would be capable of it.

His head reeled as he thought how that terrible decision rested, after all, with him. His to decide. A simple denial of the dictates of his heart, a negation of a simple matter of principle, and all these lives removed at once from jeopardy.

He had a vision of himself seated up there on the double throne, Netokris at his side. A little unhappiness for himself and Berenice—then forgetfulness!

The thought brought a stain to his cheek. His roving gaze had once more found the placid features of the Osiris. His imagination had again brought to his mental vision the clear, pure face of Berenice. He was hearing the things that Baknik had told him, and something else.

It was something that he had come across in the writings of Hermes while seeking a key to his personal problems. He had found the key without knowing it, and it was this that pulsed through his brain:

"Do that which is right without regard to consequences!"

With a firm step, a smile on his face, he started toward his place, praised and heralded by a group of lightly dressed girls.

"Oh, see Prince Menni, the builder of great works!"

"Hail Menni, as learned as he is beautiful!"

"His eyes are as beautiful as heaven!"

There was too much noise and confusion of movement; too much cadenced music, flaming lights, billowing perfumes; too much wine to make his entrance a subject of more than passing notice.

Yet there was something in Menni's face that caused Prince Tentares to lean over toward Prince Saites and crack his first tipsy jest of the evening:

"They've brought in the mummy early to-night!"

Even the melancholy Saites relaxed enough to permit a sour and wicked smile to wreath his face.

Menni had come to his place, had settled into his gold-and-hemlock chair, allowed those about him to spray him with perfume, had mentioned the wine of Samothrace.

"Drink to rapture!"

He had scarcely touched the wine to his lips when he was, as he thought, victim of a strange illusion.

Had the blaze of brilliant colors, the magnificence of his surroundings, the music, the perfume, he wondered, already mounted to his head? It couldn't be the wine. He had scarcely touched it, and, at worst, it was only slightly alcoholic. That was why he had ordered it in the first place.

It was no illusion—a mistake, perhaps, but not the chimera of overstrained nerves. He had heard it again.

It came to him, out of the great chorus of sounds about him, like the barest whisper—the whisper of a departed spirit, he reflected, that comes to one still engrossed in the turmoil of this earth.

He strained his ears, quivering with suppressed excitement.

It was her voice—the voice of Berenice—that came to him in the singing of the *almahs*.

CHAPTER XXX.

BERENICE!

EVERY chair and table occupied, the festival spirit filling the vast place like some special atmosphere of intoxication, the music drowned at times by bursts of laughter and loud huzzahs as clowns, tumblers, dancers succeeded each other on the elephant-skin, and other dancers, signers, cup-bearers, slaves bearing food, made their rounds of the tables.

No Netokris yet.

The goddess-queen would only appear when it was certain that her guests had eaten all they would. Men could still drink, in the overwhelming presence, but they were not supposed to be able to eat under such circumstances—not at a public function like this.

"Drink to rapture!"

There were many who were taking the advice—those, for the most part, who had long ago forever given up hope of being looked upon with favor by any woman, least of all the widowed queen.

But Menni had turned down his crystal tumbler, was striving with all the power of his brain and heart to once more filter out of the churning ocean of sound about him that one beloved voice.

Then, there it was, just back of him. She had called him by name.

With the instant-quick instinct of a man who has lived most of his life in the perilous school of the palace, he did not give an outward sign of his plunging heart; only turned slowly, saw her, made a quick sign that she seat herself beside him on the tiger-skin at his feet.

"Berenice, beloved! Sh-h-h! Steady.

The father of gods bless your eyes! I heard your voice!"

"My lord, beloved, I am here!"

"I have sought so for you!"

"Yea, I saw you the other night in the garden."

"She deceived me, the Rhodopis!"

"And almost killed me."

"How came you here?"

"Through him who is our friend—the Chamberlain Kovo."

"Him! I thought that it was he who played us the enemy the other night."

"No. Listen! I knew that my eyes must have deceived me when I saw—when I saw—ah! But Kovo came the next day and told me all that had taken place. Beloved, how brave you were!"

Already Menni's mind was busy with the practical features of the case. How had it come that a man like Kovo should befriend so feeble a creature as Berenice? he asked.

"He has learned something about Netokris—hints at terrible things. Oh, dear one, I fear — almost fear that Kovo intends to slay the holy one, the Isis on earth!"

"Learned something!"

Menni recalled the thing that he himself had said to the chamberlain. To as devoted a servant-worshiper as he knew Kovo to be the crime of Netokris would have been sufficient to move him to murder had she been the real Isis instead of a human symbol.

"That we—that I was in disfavor seemed to be enough. He asked me what my dearest wish would be, and, when I told him, made ready to have me here—replaced me in my prison by the poor maid whom I replace here."

There was too much going on throughout the hall for the advent of Berenice at his side to have been noticed. There were other dancing-girls and slaves seated about the carpeted and fur-covered floor. But was it possible that he was spied upon?

Menni had dropped a hand to the dear head at his knee; had plucked a lotus-blossom from it and brought it to his lips. And just then some subtle sense told him that he was being looked at.

With a very slight, whispering tremor of panic there came to him the recollection of that other time he had felt like that, here in this very room, when, almost against his will, he had made his way into the dark chamber overhead and had found the queen there awaiting him.

Was that the cause of his tremor? Was she there once more looking down at him?

He raised his eyes. He knew where the opening in the ceiling was, but the blaze of near light blinded him and prevented him from seeing it. At any rate, he smiled. Then, in a sudden passion of hate for the creature who was seeking to ruin him, bent and kissed the girl at his side—his wife—on eyes and lips.

And now, to flee!

"Berenice, are you brave?"

"Unto death, with you!"

"Listen! Death, indeed, besets us here! We'll get away together, you and I, out of this cursed place."

"Oh, to live with you, to—"

"There may be a fight. I am armed."

"And I—Kovo gave me a dagger."

"Now, when I say—when I say—"

Again there had crept through every fiber of his being that queer, freezing hint of dread. Not even Netokris could make him feel like that.

He cast his eyes about him, saw something slightly different, at first did not recognize the truth. Then he knew.

The portals between the statues on three sides of the room, those through which the guests had entered on arriving, were closed. The great monoliths had slid down into place. Out of that infernal hall there remained but one way open. And that — that was by way of the throne.

The situation was not without its grim poetry. It was like Netokris to have imagined a deadly symbolism

like that. For him and all the others there — princes, musicians, dancing-girls, clowns, gymnasts — there was only one way out, and that was by way of the throne.

He stooped again and kissed Berenice.

"Now?" she whispered softly, unafraid.

"No, not yet, dear heart," he answered her.

Should he tell her the truth? Should he delay yet a little while?

As he looked about him it seemed impossible that this was not all some fantastic dream—that this revelry, ribaldry, flashing colors, the twisting of graceful forms, the broken gusts of hauntingly sensuous music, were not the phantasmagoria of a nightmare; these things, and then that ghastly fear-touch like the traditional mummy they were wont to promenade among the guests on such a night as this!

"Drink to rapture!"

Why not drink to the feverish dream that was fast drawing near to its end?

Scarcely had he turned his crystal goblet right side up again than a slave —she herself giving evidence of having looked upon the forbidden juice of the grape—had filled it to overflowing from the painted urn she carried.

"Drink to rapture!"

Menni took up the phrase as he slipped his arm about the beloved head of his girl-bride.

"Let us drink to rapture—"

"Yes—to ours—"

She sipped at the goblet he held to her lips.

"In lives to come," he completed the sentence.

She was still looking up into his eyes, the dawn of comprehension in her own—trustful, unafraid, a perfect picture of innocence and faith, when there broke out a blare of trumpets which was swallowed up almost instantly in a mighty, frenzied, disordered cheer from slaves and guests.

Into the setting that had been prepared for her the living jewel had appeared.

Queen Netokris was on her throne.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BLACK LOTUS-FLOWER.

SHE had had a wonderful day, Queen Netokris—a wonderful and terrible day, for she had passed the preceding night trying every spell and incantation she had ever learned — the figure made by a beheaded snake, the position of black beans shaken in a bowl of rice, the flight of freed pigeons at dawn, and others less innocent, too terrible to mention. And all of them had given her the same answer. The answer was: Death!

Her own?

Her own! The answers were unanimous in that respect as well.

Was it on account of her slaying of Kashta? Perhaps. Of the sacred serpent? Most certainly.

It was this latter fact that had given the queen an added qualm of terror. It had all about it the element of the unknown, of mystery, of something she couldn't imagine or foresee.

Netokris had had a strange upbringing, surely. Not she, nor any one, knew who her parents were or what her race. Perhaps the old Kashta had known, but now Kashta was beyond telling forever, unless, forsooth, his "double," or mortal ghost, should appear to speak to her—which wasn't likely, seeing the way she had treated him.

He might appear to haunt her, might aid and abet her own taking off. It was graven in the rocks somewhere that the scribe Queni had thus been haunted for years by the double of his wife Onkhari. And this had furnished a fresh element in the emotion of that tremulous day. But frightened? Not yet! Not, that is, beyond the bounds of enjoyment.

For Netokris knew many things that seldom come within the ken of women,

or, for that matter, of any one else. From earliest childhood she had lived in the half grotto, half tomb where Kashta had made his home and cultivated his reputation as the man most feared and reverenced in the ancient land of Meroe.

Kashta had taught her all he knew of magic—all save the final mystery of making the sacred serpent talk.

He had proven his powers when he had ensnared the young Pharaoh Metemsa while on a hunting excursion into coming and looking upon Netokris while she bathed; had given further proof of his powers to the astonished world when he had caused Metemsa to marry this protégée of his and make her his consort on the double throne.

And Kashta, in his gentler moods—which were rare enough—had always told her that she, as well as her lord Osiris, was to die the violent death—"the sweetest death of all," as he was wont to say, "to one who loves such a thing."

Kashta owed her thanks for that—she had sent him out the way he wanted to go.

But what perplexed Netokris was this—that there was only one form of death provided for the man or woman who had committed the nameless sacrilege of killing the sacred serpent. Such, so the law proclaimed, should be taken by a priest of the cult and be suffocated in ashes.

Who was the priest, and where were the ashes? These questions had haunted her dreams, had haunted her while she was awake.

Then, late in the afternoon, she had found the thing she knew she had been expecting. It lay on the cedar chest at the side of the mirror in her dressing-room. A blossom which, from one end of the Nile to the other, was the symbol of approaching death—the black lotos-flower.

She was all alone when she found it. She had slept throughout most of the day, as was her custom, had bathed, and taken a brief walk in the courtyard. The flower was not there when she left. It was there when she returned.

She picked it up, examined it, then threw it, with a slight shudder, behind the chest upon which it had lain.

The same answer was given to all her questions. No one had seen any stranger there, none of the ladies in waiting—none of the slaves, even, had been seen to enter that particular room since the Isis herself had left it.

Netokris did not say why she was so intent on this information; did not say that she had felt in her heart what their answers would be even before she had begun to question them. But if she had entertained any doubts about it before, those doubts had disappeared—the flower had been put there by magic.

The black lotos-flower, symbol of death!

To some extent—but in a different way—the day had likewise been a great and terrible one for the black chamberlain, Kovo, as well.

When he had first discovered the truth of what Menni had indicated, when he learned beyond doubt that the sacred serpent, like Kashta, had been done to death, he was stupefied.

Like many men prevented from taking part in the activities of the world at large, he had developed within himself all the elements of fanaticism. Not for a second did he question the responsibility which his discovery had entailed upon him. He it was who would have to attend to the fulfilment of the law, to become the executioner.

He had not slept since the truth was revealed to him—unless you could call sleep that sort of lethargic trance into which he went at times, and during which he had the comfort and inspiration of beholding the spirit of Kashta.

Toward sunset on the day of the banquet in the subterranean treasure-house Kovo stole forth from the quar-

ters where his duties had always kept him and walked through that courtyard where there was a fig-tree at the side of the second fountain; and there he also saw something that he had come to expect—a lotus-bud of such dark blue as to be almost black. Once plucked it would become black.

It was strange that he hadn't noticed the flower before. His thin and clawlike hand was trembling as he reached out and broke the flower from its stem.

There was no need to wait. Everything was propitious. He would not be seen. He knew it, even as he started toward the apartments of the queen.

As a matter of fact, it isn't surprising that no one had noticed him—there were so many shadows assembling, like sentinels for the night, in the long corridors, the pillared rooms; he was so much like a shadow himself. As he came, so he went away again—silent, unobserved, having left the flower where the queen would find it as soon as she returned.

But the question which had troubled Netokris was also in the mind of Kovo—where and how should the law be fulfilled? Only, him the question did not trouble. He was a fanatic. He knew that the way would be provided for him.

In response to some wordless dictate born of his own brooding, he made his way toward the temple of Ptah, under which was the banquet hall. He was there, in the shadow of the god, when Menni made his appearance. He saw the expression on the young governor's face, and read it aright—the governor himself was approaching the dark frontier, and knew it.

Kovo took the incident as a sign. Then he remembered something that brought to his black and wizened face a grin of fanatic ecstasy.

There was an ash-pit in every pagan temple like this—a pit into which were cast the ashes of burned incense, ashes of the ever-burning "sacred fire."

He found it in a stone chamber which opened off of the circular gallery from which the steps descended to the banquet-room.

It was there he waited for the things which he knew his own gods had in store.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE WATER-TRAP.

LANGUIDLY, while her favorite slave massaged her lithe body with fragrant oils from Arabia-Felix, restained the tips of her toes and fingers with bright-red henna, darkened her eyes, and arranged her heavy, fragrant hair, Netokris brooded over the events of the day and all that had led up to them.

To live, to die—she couldn't tell which she preferred, anyway. It was all a matter of emotion. If, as so many wise men maintained, it was only the body which died, there were still adventures ahead, whatever happened.

She looked at herself in her mirror. What she saw sent back to her a twinge of self-detestation. It was her own presence she had addressed in vehement but silent speech.

"Beautiful only in the eyes of fools! Growing old! All the fards and paints of the world no longer sufficient to insure your triumph! A good thing that the mummy-makers will soon be hiding you from mortal sight!"

She checked her soliloquy with a start. How about the dead serpent? How about the death by ashes?

The slaves were frightened by the suddenness of her bitter laugh, bent with greater devotion to their task. The Isis was dangerous when she laughed like that.

They dressed her in a wonderful gauze, a combination of shimmering silver and lustrous gold. They laced gold and silver sandals, with pointed, high-curving tips, to her small feet, placed the Double Diadem—"of the Vulture and the Snake"—on her head,

It was light, comfortable, well-fitting, like a turban, incasing her shapely head almost entirely. Over her bare torso they wound a gossamer scarf of the palest blue upon which had been embroidered with gold thread all the insignia of the upper and lower kingdoms.

An astonishing, disquieting presence when the slaves had finished their work. No mere woman could have looked like that—none but a goddess, surely.

A sort of melancholy satisfaction filled Netokris, in spite of her recent bitterness. For a time she stood by the window-door of the apartment gazing out into the courtyard.

The night had fallen—blue-velvet darkness, an unwonted excitement in the air—sprung, perhaps, from the throng of faithful subjects who swarmed about the temple of Ptah, in the hope of having a glance at her; sprung more likely still from the conflicting emotions in the heart of Netokris herself.

Her litter, and she was borne toward the temple, escorted, as always on formal occasions, by a brilliant company.

First of all, a squad of torch-bearers—black giants with loin cloth and head-dress of white. There are many such, for the queen goddess travels in a blaze of light. Then the heralds, in their uniforms of lemon and black, blowing on their buffalo-horns.

Chamberlains and other high officials of the royal residence—these dressed, for the most part, in stripes of scarlet and olive green. A hundred girls, many of them from the best families in Egypt, in white and gold—not overmuch of either, be it said.

And in the midst of them the royal litter.

It looked as though both sun and moon had united in the making of it—gold and silver—long-stemmed gold and silver fans waving about it, torches flaring, and in the center of it all—by far the most radiant and beautiful feature of the spectacle—Netokris, the Isis of earth.

They had carried her into the interior of the temple when Netokris suddenly signified her desire to be left alone.

What were the feelings uppermost in her mind? Who will ever know? But there must have been some final hesitation on her part, some blossoming of softer instincts, perhaps, as she made her way, resplendent but heavy-hearted—as is so often the case when women are in festival attire—along the corridor lined with the statues of the gods, and entered the dark and cryptlike chamber above the banquet-hall.

Through the opening in the floor she could see all that was going on below—a riot of luxury, indulgence, of forgetfulness.

Contempt curled her lip, but she still looked, still sought that which she had come especially to see.

What was Menni doing? All in a single heart-beat she loved and loathed him, cursed and prayed for him, yearned to hold him close to her heart or to strangle him.

Then she saw—looked and looked while there blossomed in her breast another black lotus-flower — symbol of death.

Seated at Menni's feet was a girl with yellow hair—a girl whom, even at that distance and in that treacherous light, Netokris recognized.

It was Berenice. Berenice—a slave, a prisoner, a victim for the annual sacrifice—had found the means to place herself where she, Netokris, with all her power and all her cunning, had been unable to attain.

There was no question now as to what was taking place in the queenly breast. A goddess with a leaden, poison-swollen heart!

She tarried there until she saw Menni lift his face and smile in her direction, then stoop over and kiss the girl at his side.

With legs that would hardly support her weight, the queen, instead of re-

turning the way she had come, crossed the room and passed through a hidden door on the other side.

Not even Menni, the governor of the palace, knew the secret of this. He may have suspected, but he did not know. It was a secret sealed to the Pharaohs and their hereditary engineers by the lives of no one knew how many murdered slaves.

She had come into a stone passage just large enough to admit of her standing upright. It was narrow and dank. In the darkness she groped for a wooden lever, hesitated a moment, then exerted her strength to pull it far down—as far as it would go—experiencing a savage thrill as she overcame its resistance.

Then she listened.

From some place, very remote it seemed, she heard a splurging rush of water.

Still she waited, holding her breath as some invisible receptacle filled to overflowing, then clicked heavily to release the counterbalances of the granite doors of the hall below.

She reached still higher and found another lever which she pulled down as she had the first. There was a greater rushing splurge as an invisible column of water shot into one more invisible receptacle in the man-made caverns over which she stood.

"The water-trap!" she breathed.

She stood there for a second or two longer in a quiver of dread delight.

"The god Osiris," she whispered again, "will move — will move tonight."

The gaunt and sable Kovo—a mere black shadow among all the other black shadows there — saw Netokris come and go. He had started forward, hesitated, held back.

Some prescience — conveyed, perhaps, by the ghost of Kashta, who had become his guide—warning him that the moment was almost here: almost, but not yet.

Through the one door that remained open to the banquet-hall Netokris made her heavy-hearted, tragic way to the throne which had been prepared for her.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BERENICE—OR THE THRONE.

EVERY one was standing. There were those who stood none too steadily—who leaned on the tables or were propped up by slaves who knew when and when not to laugh.

None of the slaves were laughing now. Most of them had developed the supersensitive instincts of hunted animals, and laughter had become for them merely a means of prolonging life.

And even then, while the cheering was going on, while the buffalo-horns of the heralds were roaring out their din, and every harpist, flute-player, and chorister in the place was trying to shape the confusion into the primitive strains of the "Hymn to Isis," even then there was something in the air which kept the supersensitive slaves from laughing, secretly or otherwise.

Was it possible that some subtle message of what was impending had radiated out from Netokris herself?

For almost a minute after her appearance she had stood there like an exquisite but strangely sinister statue of ivory, silver and gold, a slight smile on her painted lips, her green eyes as inscrutable as those of a basilisk.

Menni had also risen to his feet, but he had taken no part in the cheering. He stood rigidly erect, his heart beating strong, his left arm flexed about Berenice's slender but steady shoulders.

It calmed and fortified him to feel that there was no fear in Berenice any more than there was in himself, now that the crisis was at hand. It clarified his vision as nothing else could have done.

They had found—he and this girl he loved, his bride—the chemistry of courage. Let mountains fall upon

them, let the flood of the Nile sweep over them; still they were safe, united, joyful, unafraid.

Netokris had not so much as looked in his direction. Whether she had seen him at all or not he could not tell. Her eyes were those of one who sees all things or nothing.

Then she sank down upon the lion-covered throne, the eyes of her guests, and of almost every one else present, still upon her. Still they remained standing while a chamberlain, in his robes of scarlet and olive-green, knelt before her with a crystal cup. This she touched to her lips—a symbol that those who were there had dined with the Isis.

Such a tradition—one that could be handed on in even a princely family for generation after generation; one that would be engraved deep in the rocks of the tombs—"He dined with the Pharaoh!"

Then the guests were seated again, some of them—those who had not drunk as much as the others—wondering what was going to happen or had already happened. A supersensitive instinct was no longer necessary to proclaim a change.

The "Hymn to Isis" had by this time gained ascendency over all other sounds, and was throbbing through the heavy atmosphere of the place, flutes and harps, voices of men and women.

But the change that had taken place could not be ascribed to this. It was greater than sound. It was as though the fumes of revelry had suddenly been blown away like smoke.

Even Prince Tentares—his fat face pink where it wasn't purple—found himself suddenly, heavily sober.

Where were the group of young dancers who had surrounded him, only a minute before, when the Isis appeared?

Gone!

He glanced round him heavily, striving to regain control of his blurred faculties.

He saw the furtive and melancholy Prince Saites glide from his place, make his way toward the green bower which surrounded the room, attempt to pass by one of the openings through which the slaves hitherto had come and gone. Then there occurred something which Prince Tentares was never to be sure was reality or the figment of his wine-drenched brain.

He saw Saites at the arbor; saw him halted by a black slave; saw Saites fall as though he had been stabbed.

Tentares dragged his eyes away and looked round him. It was true that the chair in which Saites had sat was empty.

For a ghastly moment everything about him disappeared—lights, colors, the draped dais on which Netokris sat. He swayed slightly. Instead of the things which he had just been seeing he saw the moonlit peristyle of a temple; saw Metemsa, the Pharaoh, approaching alone while he and Saites and the other conspirators shrunk together behind the columns.

Had they been found out? Had the truth been revealed? Was this the vengeance of the gods?

Those nearest Tentares saw his face turn ruddier still; saw him totter for a step or two, then fall.

Ordinarily it would have been a great event—this swooning of such a rich and famous prince as Tentares was, there in the presence of his queen. It would have been a greater event, even, than the stabbing of Saites, had they seen it, for Saites was a man of many enemies, and his principality was small. But, for the dullest witted, the chilling change that had come over the face of things was now apparent—a change so grisly and heart-chilling that not even the fall of Tentares was of any importance compared to it.

Two things—the music had stopped; a naked runner, his brown skin glistening with sweat, was crouching at the feet of Netokris.

In the swift silence that engulfed the place there was heard the muffled, gurgling splash of hidden waters.

A petrifying spectacle!

Most of those there—princes, slaves, musicians, all those who had not run away while there yet was time—no less immobile than the eight colossal statues which looked down upon them: that naked slave crouching at the feet of Netokris, a most incongruous personage in a banquet-hall—as incongruous as the close silence, the far rumble of water.

Menni and Berenice were conscious of the change, perhaps, before the others there. It was but a vaster harmony to the tragic theme of their own destinies.

Then, just as the runner appeared on the dais of the throne, Menni heard himself addressed. He turned, saw standing there a man whom he recognized as one of the Macedonians under the command of Kalthos.

The Macedonian was too far gone for speech, was gasping for air through tight lips. But there was no need for speech. He was holding out a bit of crumpled papyrus.

Menni took it, recognized the work of Kalthos—crude, hasty, but legible and graphic.

> Come. Now the Double Palace fall before our assault. Lo, now may Prince Menni himself be the Osiris!

A reeling second, then Menni turned to the man who had brought the message.

"It is well. Flee! Tell him who sent you—"

The man had panted back some of his breath.

"Kalthos bade me see you safe. The palace was taken when I left him. A revolution — you—you — he could not write it, but he commanded me to say all the troops are yours!"

"Then hurry. We follow."

Even as Menni said it his voice failed him. There had gripped him the choking sentiment that what he said were empty words; that what he said couldn't be — a vision of closed doors, of Baknik and his councillors far above him some place in the starlit night. There followed a swift revulsion. All this in the fragment of a second.

At his word the Macedonian had leaped forward toward the nearest opening in the encircling bower. A Nubian stopped him. The Macedonian had run the black through, turned with the word "Now" forming on his lips just as the mace of another sable giant from the south crushed him to earth.

Menni paused.

For a second he didn't dare even look at Berenice. Still hope, had he been alone! Still time for a man to fight his way to freedom, to the outer air, to the double throne!

But encumbered as he was!

His eyes flashed to the throne. Netokris was looking at him—alert, cruel, a savage smile on her lips.

He shook his fist at her—laughed as he did it—then, as a new and hideous clamor broke out in a far corner of the hall, swept Berenice into his arms.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

OSIRIS MOVES!

A NEW and hideous clamor beginning with a drunken cry of fright, a shriek, a dozen of them, a chattering crescendo, as the momentary lull that had fallen upon the place a dozen seconds before exploded into disordered sound.

So peculiar is the action of the human mind in a crisis like this that Menni believed, for the instant, that this was the response of the mob to his defiance of the queen. But before he could turn he knew the truth—bellowed in upon him.

"Osiris! Osiris—moves!"

There was a sort of ripping thunder, as though all the heralds had gone mad, were screeching their madness through their buffalo horns. But over it all, and over the shrieks which were inarticulate—

"The god moves!"

Then that other sound, answer to the question that had sprung into his brain the very instant that he had heard the words he knew now he had been expecting all along. He was even surprised that he had not heard it before—that surging splash of water.

All this while he was turning. Then he saw it.

One of the colossal statues was still trembling on its outward swing, shaken by the rush of pent-up waters.

The current was doubled while he looked—a mere, fleeting glance though it was. How brown that water was!

The Nile, when troubled!

The Nile, and this the prediction—this the hour that had been foretold! There was a feeling almost of elation in his heart.

He was only half-conscious of what he said. It was more of a glad, wild cry, anyway, than anything articulate.

"Oh, see! Oh, see!"

Berenice had also exclaimed, was looking up at him, her face flushed, her eyes shining. At that there disappeared his last remaining shred of regret. He knew now how she felt about it. They were one in that.

There was a jamming herd from the far parts of the room—guests and slaves, men and women.

At first, here and there, hysterical laughter; a monarch from the Delta, still hung about with bedraggled lotus, standing on his table and bellowing to others to do likewise; a supreme jest of the Isis—thus would she find the brave; the howling mockery of those who couldn't understand, even now.

But everything was changing with incredible rapidity; changed as a castle in the sand changes with the sudden wash of a wave.

A mere breath of time, and then the howling stampede — blows, curses, whimpers, prayers, the overpowering, all-absorbing rush of water.

The moment that he had seen the nature of the catastrophe Menni had leaped, bright-eyed, smiling, trailing Berenice by the hand, stooped, and seized the Macedonian's short-handled spear. It was better to be armed.

He had a flashing vision of a Nubian's face peering at him from the bower.

He poised the spear. The face disappeared.

They were in an eddy of the crowd. Moblike it had surged toward the far corner where others had disappeared apparently to safety. Menni guessed the truth. That portion of the Nubian guard which had been placed on that side of the hall had yielded either to force of numbers or to fear.

"Come!"

Menni had to shriek the word to be heard at all.

The water was a plunging brown cataract now; was slopping over the floor half-way to his knees, its lapping surface half covered with a litter of scarfs and flowers, of branches and pelts.

They plunged toward the throne. One try, anyway. He laughed and drew Berenice after him.

If he could only kill Netokris! He shouted his intention to Berenice, though he knew she couldn't hear him.

Was she trapped, too?

Again their eyes met—his and the green eyes of the Isis.

It must have been but the barest fraction of a second, measureless, like all of this, in ordinary terms of time—a succession of infinitesimal flashes—no more.

His spear-hand was up.

On it there flashed the blue sapphire. Of that he was conscious. Of all the things he saw, of all the things he heard, and all the things that he was conscious of (though he neither saw nor heard them in the whirling surge of impressions), that sapphire still on his hand was one of the mighty facts—as mighty almost as the great fact that this was the fulfilment of the prophecy, and that he and Berenice were about to die—die together here in the boiling waters of Father Nile!

Then, even while he looked—in that infinite flash, while surely they had made but a splashing lunge or two—he saw a gaunt, black shadow spring from the draped skins of zebras and giraffes just back of the throne. He saw the black shadow seize upon the queen—a jungle spider that clutches a glittering bird!

This—then shadow and queen were gone.

Menni looked back at Berenice—the first touch of horror amid all the horror that struggled so near to them. She also had seen it. Her eyes told him so.

They reached the throne, and plunged across it to the door that was hidden beyond.

That also shut.

Menni had caught Berenice's face to his breast, fearful lest she should see—not the closed door, but the shambles there.

The door was closed, and against it a mass of fighting black giants. They had been sent to hold others to the death; had received no warning themselves of what might be in store; had looked with indifference on the panic, on the rush of water.

All in good time and they would escape!

Too late!

What was there left to do but slaughter, to surfeit the blood-lust as long as there was blood to shed?

Berenice's face against his breast, he staggered back—back as far as possible from the struggling, shrieking wretches.

Why shriek and howl and weep and pray? The granite has no ears to hear. And even if there was escape! What for? What to? A little more time to breathe, to eat, to suffer, or to laugh!

He had thrown the useless spear away; had lifted Berenice as though she were a child. A swirling torrent almost carried him from his feet. He swayed against it; smiled at the girl. Joy once more flashed into her eyes.

"We die together!"

She spoke it with her lips to his.

"No, live—"

"Together!"

The clamor and the lights died out together.

The waters were whirling and churning deeper and deeper until they were swallowing the very cataract that fed them.

Then darkness and silence—silence save for the suck and slap of dispassionate waves.

"We—defied—Rhodopis—"

"Through—love—through—"

Peace ineffable! His eyes fluttered open.

CHAPTER XXXV.

FORWARD, FIVE THOUSAND YEARS.

His brow was wet.

He recognized the characteristic smell of Nile water.

But he had ceased to struggle.

A delicious lassitude had overspread his body. He saw them but dimly—the blue eyes of Berenice—but they were looking down at him full of love and tenderness, even with a certain joy which he felt instinctively had not been there before. With recognition, such peaceful joy came into his empty heart he almost wept. If this was death, it was very sweet.

"We defied Rhodopis," he murmured.

The words did not come as easily as they should. This perhaps was a condition of his new state with which he was as yet unfamiliar.

A strange yet familiar voice came to him out of space to the left of him.

"He speaks of your Aunt Rhodopis—"

"Not of Aunt Rhodopis," he protested; "but of Netokris, the infamous—"

He had turned his head slightly and was looking at the speaker.

"Hello, Nefru!" he said.

"Oh, Alice," said the elderly lady.

" he is still delirious! He calls me his nephew."

Alice! Berenice!

The late governor of the palace of the Pharaohs sat up. He was feeling a trifle giddy. He knew there was a misapprehension somewhere. But his senses were becoming instantly clearer.

He resented the charge that he was still delirious, even if he ever had been.

" Where am I? " he asked.

Gentle hands were trying to force him back to his pillow as the beloved voice of Berenice—or Alice—was telling him that he was safe in his bed at Shepheard's.

He allowed himself to be coerced, and closed his eyes for a moment or two while his head sank deeper into the pillow.

" This is Egypt? "

" Yes, dear."

" And Memphis? "

" No, dear; this is Cairo."

That gave him food for meditation. Cairo—Cairo! The name was absurdly familiar.

" Aren't the pyramids there, across the sacred lake? "

Before any one could answer the question there was a soft tap at the door, then a hearty voice:

" Easy, there! Easy, there! "

" Kalthos! " the ex-governor murmured.

Followed another minute of dazed groping, then he felt a goblet on his lips. He drank. Whatever the brew, it was astonishingly aromatic and refreshing. By the time that he had accomplished his third swallow of it his mental sun was up altogether and chasing the mists away.

Again he opened his eyes, and this time recognized his old friend Blake, the hotel physician.

" Hello, doc! " he said blandly.

" Hello, Carlton! " said the doctor cheerfully.

" Just now," Carlton remarked gravely, " I thought I was Menni."

" One of you is enough if you're going to act like this," replied Dr. Blake jovially. " Here, take another drink of this."

There was a flutter at his side which caused Carlton to turn abruptly to the girl with the fair hair and violet eyes. He reached out and took her hand.

He knew perfectly well now that she was Alice; but as yet it hardly seemed fair to call her anything but Berenice. He compromised.

" Sweetheart," he whispered, " you and I were married once upon a time long ago in ancient Egypt."

It was a pretty little scene—Carlton a trifle pale and hollow-eyed, Alice blushing prettily.

Her aunt knew that she should have become indignant. Why, they were hardly promised to each other! No contract had been signed. The family solicitor had not even been consulted as yet. But the aunt could not become indignant, try as she would.

Instead, there was merely a moistening of her eyes, a slight reddening of her honest, unpowdered nose.

Carlton still smiled tenderly as he looked at her past Alice, again thought of old Nefru that morning they had left her — he and Berenice, he and Alice—there by the red Pyramid of Menkaura. Was it not just possible, after all, that they were the same?

" Now, not too much conversation," said Dr. Blake as he prepared to leave.

" Kalthos giving a command," Carlton reflected. " I wonder how he came out with his assault on the palace? "

He was still clinging to Alice's hand. Again his eyes had found hers.

" It's all right, doc," he said aloud; " I'm going to let them do most of the talking. And now "—he began as a blind to deceive the physician until they were alone and he could proceed at leisure to find out the things that he most wished to know—" and now, my little darling, tell me where you have been."

Alice's face was suffused with a fresh blush. It was delightful, but George had never spoken to her like this in the presence of auntie.

Auntie expressed her own emotions with a slight ejaculation, rather of consternation than of anger.

"Well, there's American impetuosity for you!"

"We went up the Nile," Alice hastily took up the tale to cover any embarrassment which might be abroad. "We went the full distance, visited everything, the tombs at Abydos—oh, yes, I must tell you!"

She hesitated, a bashful light in her eyes, an almost schoolgirlish giggle on her pink lips.

"I almost—*almost!*—brought you a present. Just before auntie and I went back to the steamer at Abydos a miserable heathen, clad in nothing but grins and mud, came along with the dearest little rabbit in his arms. I bought him — the rabbit, not the heathen—and was going to bring him to you. The dearest little rabbit! I thought of you when I kissed him—"

She stopped, amazed at her own hardihood, and there in front of her aunt!

"Thanks — the rabbit looked like me, I suppose," Carlton laughed.

Then, as recollection from the past again welled up from the secret places of his brain:

"Hold!" he cried; "let me tell you the rest of it. You kissed the bunny on the head and wrongfully thought of me; the rabbit jumped from your arms, raced down the plank, and got away. The children chased him into some reeds, but failed to catch him."

Both Alice and her aunt were looking at him in frank amazement.

"You were there!"

"Some one told you!"

"Yes, some one told me," Carlton said with a shade of desperation — "some one named Baknik!"

Yet, surprising as all this was to Alice and her aunt, there was a still greater surprise in store.

It was surprising, as a matter of fact, that no one fainted—and this refers to Carlton quite as much as it does to the women.

Carlton had shifted his position a little to his right side, a movement which brought his left hand for the first time into view.

There was a flash of blue—of the very bluest blue in the world.

"The sapphire!"

"The ring my Aunt Rhodopis lost!"

The latter exclamation from Alice was frankly emotional. What followed was almost a sob.

"Oh, George! Where did you get it?"

Carlton himself was looking at the gem which adorned his finger. Where did he get it? It was another question that was pounding through his brain just then.

Suppose that he told. Would they ever—ever believe him?

Silently he looked from the sapphire on his hand to Alice, to Alice's aunt; then back again.

"You found it!" Alice exclaimed tremulously as she tried to smile.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LADY RHODOPIS TREVELYN.

It is just as well perhaps that both Alice and her aunt were willing to put down much that followed in the next few minutes to Carlton's illness — as the evaporating figments of his recent delirium.

He said such queer things—was so oddly incoherent! Time after time he had confused the Egypt of to-day and the Egypt of thousands of years ago.

At last they went away and left him "to rest" in the vehemently protested watchfulness of the faithful Osman.

But in the minds of both of them, and in Carlton's mind, was the fact—tangible, hard, brilliant — that on his hand was a sapphire of price—if, indeed, it was not priceless!—that was not his own; which was, according to all the evidence thus far presented, the property of one Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn!

For a minute or two after the ladies

had gone Carlton watched. Osman slipped noiselessly about the room — immaculate in his white, night-gownish *galabeah,* his red *tarboosh* set at a rakish angle on his close-cropped head.

"Osman, get me a Scotch and soda while I get up."

Osman looked at the patient with a superior smile while he slowly wagged a finger of denial.

"To-day, medicine; to-morrow, Scotch!"

"Osman," remarked Carlton with disconcerting indifference, "you remind me of a slave I once owned by the name of Naktmout. Do you know what happened to him?"

It was evident from Osman's expression that he didn't know, but was eager to learn.

"He disappeared," said Carlton steadily; "disappeared just like that."

Said Osman: "Scotch to-day, medicine to-morrow!"

Apart from the one great fact of the sapphire, and the lesser, but possibly no less surprising incident of the rabbit which Alice had bought at Abydos, the affair might have appeared simple enough.

He had gone out to the pyramid of Menkaura "on the night of a new moon," and then something had happened to him. A recurrence of the effects of that old sunstroke of his, most likely. He had been discovered in the morning by Arabs and a small party of tourists, identified, and sent back to his hotel.

All within twenty-four hours!

The ice tinkled in his glass, and he stared down at the jewel on his hand.

Fair Rhodopé, as story tells,
The bright, unearthly nymph who dwells
'Mid sunless gold and jewels hid—

It must be known, this sapphire, since both Alice and her aunt had cried out so spontaneously at sight of it.

And there had been something else; something hidden and disquieting in their reference to "Aunt Rhodopis," just as there had been in the reference that Alice had made to that lady the other time, when Alice referred to her early girlhood. Alice's words returned to him: "She struck me!"

Rhodopis had struck Alice. Might it not be that Netokris, rather, had struck Berenice?

Carlton had a shivering flash of thought about the mad Arabs he had questioned—the old man on the steps of the mosque of Ibn-Tulun, the beggar at the door of the Coptic church. Was he to join that crazy band? He laughed mirthlessly. He, also, had seen the Woman of the Pyramid!

He was feeling a trifle dizzy — in spite of or because of his Scotch— but, with the aid of the protesting Osman, he managed to dress himself. He would look up Alice, get what consolation he could from her society, anyway, and put the whole plagued riddle off until his head was solid enough to tackle it in a scientific way.

He was in the lower hall — a vast and ornate place suggesting, with its pillars and exotic plants, its swooning music and intermittent gusts of perfume, the Double Palace of the Pharaohs—and he walked toward the shadowy alcove where letters and telegrams were distributed.

The place was presided over by a well-groomed young Englishman with whom Carlton was on excellent terms.

But, for the moment, Carlton wasn't seeing him at all.

Instead, his eyes were riveted on a small, hand-written placard suspended to one of the pillars. This placard read:

LOST—Antique ring with sapphire known as the "Tear of Ra."

He was still gazing at this curiously insufficient but startling announcement when, just at the side of him, there was the soft *frou-frou* of a passing woman; a woman who was exceedingly well dressed, who threw out from her—at least it impressed Carlton that way—a nebula of perfume and personal magnetism.

He felt all this even before he looked at her. Perfume and magnetism—call it that for want of a better term—gave him an inexplicable thrill of horror.

It was deeper and more subtle than a mere physical thrill. It was something that sprung from the deepest cells at the back of his brain and thence spread outward.

The lady had paused and was speaking to the young Englishman in a well-modulated voice:

"Is there anything for me?"

"Nothing, Lady Rhodopis—"

The woman passed on. Her carriage was erect, graceful, and quick. Was it possible that she stopped at the other end of the hall, turned, and looked back?

Carlton didn't notice. He was hoping that, if he did go insane, they wouldn't have to put him in a straight-jacket; that they would "remove" him to California.

"Dear! Dear! Mr. Carlton," exclaimed the young Englishman, "you should be in bed, sir!"

Said Carlton: "Eyes staring, pupils large—"

"No; but joking apart, sir, you do look a bit queer, you know, and it's rather serious to be knocked out—"

"By whisky or hashish."

"No danger. Dr. Blake himself put it down to that old touch of the sun; as did also, of course, every one else, including her ladyship."

"Her ladyship?"

"Bless me!" he cried, "are you still in the dark as to what happened to you?"

"I most certainly am. Go ahead. Her ladyship—Lady Rhodopis—"

"Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn—it was she who found you. She is always doing things like that. A trifle—ump! how shall I put it?—a trifle—oh, you know—rich, eccentric, and—the kind of woman that other women whisper when they talk about."

"*Demi-monde?*"

"Ump! *Trois-quarts.*"

"Go on!"

"Well, she was indulging one of those freaks necessary to ladies of her peculiar temperament, it seems; had gone out to see the pyramids by starlight; found it so 'alluring, so exquisitely fascinating,' as she put it, that nothing would do but she make a night of it, have her breakfast sent out from the hotel—a regular caravan, and all that sort of thing.

"And, along after the sun is well up, my lady and her escorts find you in some impossible crevice of the Third Pyramid. Great excitement, greater excitement still — meaning not the slightest grain of disrespect, you understand—when Lady Rhodopis discovers that she has lost that famous sapphire of hers."

"Really famous?"

"Oh, dear, yes!" Pantlin answered. "'Tear of Ra,' old Egyptian gem, all sorts of queer superstitions about it, carries hypnotic power; any one who steals it, or even keeps it, or something like that, becomes the willing slave of the rightful owner. Oh, all sorts of blithering nonsense! But she herself is a mystery."

"How so?"

"A regular mystery until she married the late Sir Rupert. He met her out here some place, you know. Romantic story; while on a shooting-trip saw her taking an open-air bath, or something like that. Not long afterward, if you recollect, he was—"

"Murdered—stabbed full of holes."

Spontaneously, almost unconsciously, Carlton had completed the phrase.

Before he could recover from his own surprise there was once again that suggestive *frou-frou*, and he was aware of the same cloud of perfume and magnetism, the same whiff of horror, which he had remarked before.

He closed his eyes for a second. His imagination presented a scene all pillars and exotic plants; but whether this was a mental picture of the modern hotel in which he stood or the Double Palace of the Pharaohs, in which he once had stood, he could not say.

Nor could he, for a faltering moment or two, have stated with certainty who or what was this other presence there beside himself.

He opened his eyes.

The same woman who had been there a little while ago had returned—slender, beautiful, somehow snakelike.

"Oh, Mr. Pantlin," Carlton heard her say in a voice that stirred him strangely, "I forgot—"

Then she turned and looked into Carlton's wondering eyes.

— —

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ALICE GETS A SHOCK.

Of one thing he was absolutely certain; she was that particular "familiar spirit" of his—the alluring "ghost" he had seen in London, in Munich—that night in the Ludwigstrasse with the music of "Aïda" in the air—again in the Bois de Boulogne when the Tziganes were shivering the atmosphere into prismatic chords.

Greenish eyes, long-fringed, hypnotic, somewhat cruel; thin, black brows, almost perfectly straight except where they drooped at the temples; lips of a coral perfection one could scarcely expect from nature unassisted.

Instinctively Carlton looked at her finger-tips. They were exquisitely manicured and delicately pink.

His eyes were back to her face again. Quite apart from any volition on his part, there had come to his eyes a glow of suspicion and challenge.

"Oh, Lady Rhodopis, permit me, pray—" the eager Pantlin interceded. "This is Mr. Carlton, of California. Mr. Carlton, Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn."

As his fingers closed over hers, Carlton felt them tremble slightly. If Lady Rhodopis was experiencing anything like the emotional hurricane through which he himself was passing, it wasn't surprising that her fingers trembled.

"I understand," said Carlton softly—softly enough to conceal most of the tremor in it—"I understand that I am deeply indebted to you, that it was you who saved my life."

She bit her pink lip, turned to the young Englishman.

"Do take down that absurd sign, Mr. Pantlin. I am sure that I'll get my ring back without—without—"

Carlton opened his mouth to speak, to confess that the sapphire—the Tear of Ra!—had already been found, was even then reposing safely in his pocket; but for the moment he was as voiceless as a sparrow in front of a blue racer.

"I was on the point of having some tea. In fact, the table is waiting now," Lady Rhodopis was saying. "I am all alone. You will come along with me, won't you, Mr. Carlton?"

For another fraction of a second Carlton was silent. Where was that confounded voice of his?

"Why—why certainly," he stammered.

Good Heavens! Was he a thief? Was he hypnotized?

Was he stark mad, like the old man on the steps of the mosque of Ibn-Tulun? Would tourists be hunting him up some day to hear him tell about the time that he was young, the admired of Mark Twain, and how he had gone out to keep a rendezvous with the Woman of the Pyramid?

All the time that he was walking along that pillared, lofty hallway he was obsessed by a sense of unreality, by the haunting uncertainty as to whether this really was the hotel or the Double Palace, whether this was Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn at his side or Netokris, she who united the two kingdoms, Isis on earth.

Half a dozen times he had opened his mouth to speak about the gem which had come inexplicably into his possession. But each time, as though inspired by some satanic instinct, his companion had forestalled him with some random remark.

It was as though her personality wasn't limited at all by the exquisite dress that clad her slender shape—a dress of lace and gold, he vaguely noted—but this personality of hers encompassed him all about in her special atmosphere of delicate perfume and powerful magnetism.

By the time that the suave and silent *suffragi* had placed them at the reserved table Carlton had ceased to struggle. Moreover, as he looked at her across the linen and silver he thought that never before in his life had he seen a woman more potentially perilous to masculine peace of mind.

He could see that every man within the range of vision was conscious of her presence. It was but another detail to strengthen the hold upon him his hallucination already had. That was the way certain princes he had known had once upon a time looked at a queen of ancient Egypt.

Perhaps this last feature suggested itself as Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn cast at him a sudden look from her Nile-green eyes—a look which might or might not have been full of veiled significance.

Lofty ceiling, painted pillars, rare plants, the pulsing music of a hidden orchestra, in which, for the moment, the harps and flutes seemed to have the best of it; high, wide-open windows, through which were visible segments of a sky so near and blue as to seem almost tangible: these things and the presence of her whom he felt he had known across the centuries, who roused within him a frost-needle of fear, and yet, likewise, the glamour of fascination.

Suddenly she spoke:

"Are you angry?"

The question caught him by surprise, yet, at the same time, precipitated his doubts.

"You're trying to play me for a fool," he said softly, yet with brutal directness. "Tell me—you've haunted me? You've sent your spirit across my path?"

Her voice was even softer than his. She had leaned forward. All at once her breath was coming quick.

"What you say is true. An old, old trick—as old as Egypt, as old as the world—this making your astral image appear before some one whom—whom—"

"Whom—"

It was more of a command than a question. It brought a stain of darker color to the woman's cheeks.

"Whom you love," she whispered falteringly.

"Good God!"

"Quiet! Closer! I've loved you—loved you ever since I saw you on that first trip of yours to Egypt. But I wasn't free. And then, as soon as I was free, I began to seek. Oh, listen! You, who are a scientist, explain this to me—the mystery of love at first sight, yet one-sided. See—"

With a quick movement she had half opened the fan she was carrying, had indicated in the fold a thin-bladed dagger.

He looked at it with horror as its blade shimmered there in shadow—a flashing thread of sinister, phosphorescent light.

"Not yet," she repeated with a little laugh. "I have found out the futility of it, and there is still a chance. *I* studied magic under an old man in Abyssinia—"

"Of ancient Meroe."

"And he gave me a certain gem."

"The sapphire—it was you who put it on my finger."

He reached for it, but she stopped him with a movement and a flash of her eyes not devoid of terror.

"Keep it yet a while."

"Why?"

"My old faith in it is strong. It has magical powers, magnetic—electricity in solid form, a thing to work miracles with. Moses knew when he put jewels in the ephod."

"And your miracle—what is it you expect?"

She shuddered slightly.

"That day you give it back," she breathed, "I shall know whether to use this dagger of mine or not. They call me Rhodopis, but I am Netokris still."

Alice Wentworth was both alarmed and pleased when she had got back word from Carlton's room that he had gone out. He was always so bold and indifferent of consequences! Still she was just a little piqued that he hadn't, first of all, let her know.

There was sufficient reason why they should see each other and have a talk—the matter of that sapphire. It was the talk of the hotel that her aunt had lost it. It was equally the talk of the hotel that Aunt Rhodopis had been Carlton's rescuer.

Expectant, troubled, increasingly eager to find the principal player in the little drama of her thought, she had turned into the tea-room. A careless glance, and then she was standing petrified.

There was Carlton and there was Aunt Rhodopis. Her they had not noticed at all as they gazed into each other's eyes.

She started to turn away, a premonitory pang of terror in her heart, turned back for one more look.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

FAREWELL, EGYPT!

Loneliness, disillusionment, the utter vacuity of life on this planet, or any other, so far as he could imagine it!

That sums up to a certain extent the result of the long and careful analysis of things in general made by the gifted young scientist, George Carlton, Esq., as he gazed out of his window over the smiling land of Egypt.

He confessed to himself that for the past couple of weeks he had not been in a particularly brilliant condition to note facts and draw deductions from them. But he was pretty certain, none the less, that his conclusions were generally correct.

During this period he had seen scarcely any one save Osman and his friend, Dr. Blake. But he had kept himself informed, in a dazed, detached sort of way, of all the news which concerned him most.

An intermittent fever, purely physical, had kept him in bed ever since the ball. Another sort of fever—likewise intermittent, but in no sense physical—had kept his thoughts from ordinary activities, as well.

Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn gone!

She had surprised every one by packing up her thirty-three trunks and getting away far before the usual date of her annual departure. Women glad of it, men sorry.

It would have been difficult to say which he was, glad or sorry, so far as Carlton was concerned. In his moments of dejection he wished that he had never seen her, cursed her and everything that appertained to her. But, as his health came back, such moods became increasingly less frequent.

He would fight the thing out, find out all that it had to yield.

He could have sent that sapphire of hers—either by registered mail or by some trusted messenger from among his acquaintances — to her house in Park Lane. But he could not bring himself to do it. The thing had cost him too much already to surrender it now without finding out, one way or another, just what there was to it.

For Alice and her Aunt Mary had also gone away.

The thing bit into his soul. He knew now, if he had never known it before, that Alice Wentworth was the preordained. He and she had lived and suffered together in ages gone. He felt the tidal wave in his heart of all the devotion to her which had begun—like the attraction between sea and moon—at the very beginning of things, which always had been and always would be.

"I heard another crazy man," said Osman as he arranged some flowers on the center table, "who claims to have also seen the woman of the pyramid."

"Bah!"

He shuffled about his room in pajamas and slippers, got rid of Osman, brought out the little farewell note that Alice had written him, essayed again to extract consolation from it.

DEAR GEORGE:

I am so sorry that you are ill; that we must leave—Aunt Mary and I—while you are still down. We have been such good, good friends.

But Dr. Blake assures us that there is not the slightest danger; that you are getting on famously. Please do not think that I was angry when you told me over the telephone that you still had the sapphire. Of course you know best.

With very best wishes from both auntie and myself, believe me always,

Your sincere friend,

ALICE WENTWORTH.

Blessed little contentment could he extract from that!

He owed this to Alice, as well as to himself. He ran his fingers through his hair, stood puffing at a cigarette for a while as he stared down at the writing-pad on the desk in front of him. Then he sat down and began to write.

It was a letter to Alice, but much of it he was afterward to use in that not very widely circulated but justly famous monograph of his. For this reason it will, perhaps, be permissible to quote an extract or two. He wrote:

Psychology still remains in a chaotic state. Of all the ancient sciences, it remains the one science in which no apparent progress has been made in the last ten thousand years.

It is only by research such as this that we may hope to make progress—the careful, scientific scrutiny of mental phenomena.

Such an experience I have had, an experience all but unique in scientific history. I should, indeed, add a weight to my conscience did I fail to study it further in all its aspects—magic, witchcraft, glamour, hypnotism, unconscious cerebration.

Poor Alice! We wonder how much contentment she could extract from that? But the longer that Carlton wrote the less he was thinking about Alice, the more he was thinking about the absorbing theme his own "case" suggested.

One more extract, as an example, and that will be all:

To many investigators, in recent years, it has become increasingly apparent that in so far as using the mind as an instrument is concerned, the west has still everything to learn from the east.

To examine the stars, we of the west have invented telescopes. They of the east have so developed their mental powers that they can send their spirits to rove at will in sidereal space. How, otherwise, can we account for the accurate astronomical knowledge of the ancient Egyptians, the Chaldeans, the Chinese? They had no telescopes.

To examine the infinitely small, we of the west have invented the microscope. They of the east, by an effort of the will, can reduce consciousness so infinitesimally small that they study the anatomy of a microbe as we, with our clumsier tools, might study the anatomy of an earthworm or an elephant.

Now, after all that I have seen, I am convinced that the ancient Egyptians did more; that they applied their mental powers not only to perception—to seeing the infinitely small and the infinitely great—but to dynamics as well.

In other words, that many of the stupendous tasks they accomplished—to-day impossible—were accomplished by *thought-power* alone.

There were other strange bits—many of them, for the letter was a long one. Take, for example, the reason he gave for hanging on to that troublesome sapphire.

It is impossible to make a direct quotation—either from the letter, because here he became tender and reminiscent, repeating much that we already know and much that no one but he and Alice has any right to know;

nor from that subsequent monograph of his, because here his language is altogether too technical—language that no ordinary man could understand, even with a dictionary at his elbow.

It all had to do with something he called "metempsychosis," a weird mental power he had first encountered among certain highly developed holy men of India.

Given a fragment of bone, for example, such a man could clearly see and describe the entire animal from which the bone had been derived—whether his neighbor's cat or a prehistoric mastodon.

Given a bead or an amulet or a shred of linen from an ancient tomb, the wise man could fix his "third eye" upon it and see the original owner as clearly as though he were still on earth and standing there in front of him; not only the original owner, but the civilization in which he lived, his personal habits, his private vices, and things like that.

Now, according to his own explanation, that was why Carlton persisted in clinging to the sapphire Aunt Rhodopis had unquestionably thrust upon him—in clinging to it even at the risk of losing the very best girl on earth.

It wasn't the spell that mattered so much. He wasn't interested in Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn's love-affairs; nor in his own, if the truth be told.

He was thinking of metempsychosis, no less. It was thus he explained that deep, deep look he had taken into the daily life of old Egypt. By the grace of Ammon-Ra, he hoped, through the same means, to do it again.

Then who would have further reason to mourn the lost wisdom of the past!

Carlton read this remarkable missive over again after he had finished it. The oddest love-letter ever written, surely! There was a wry smile on his face.

"I've seen the Woman of the Pyramid," he soliloquized. "I have, all right. I'm loony; I'm crazy."

Then, having done what he had to do, he was suddenly submerged with homesickness, a mad desire to get away.

Alice gone. Rhodopis gone. No one left in Egypt but himself and the ghosts in his brain.

Egypt, farewell!

Before this, you have sent out tragedy and mystery and love, O thou sacred land of Kem! Which of the trilogy are you sending out with this youth who sails away from your delta now? Of all the men and women who crowd those white decks, he alone has a memory of the days of your youth. He carries away with him the only teardrop shed by the father of all your gods, 'way back in the dawn of creation; the tear he shed when sin first appeared on earth.

What do you send along with it—tragedy or mystery or love; or all of them, as you've so often done before?

The above is an inadequate transcript of George Carlton's mood as the steamer he was on drifted her quiet way past felucca and yacht, past dirty schooners with red sails, past trim, great square-rigged ships, past a long white transport with the Stars and Stripes aloft.

Egypt, farewell!

Had something really happened to him? Wasn't he just a trifle unhinged? He had never felt so terribly choky and sentimental in his life.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CARLTON DECIDES.

SPRING was already far advanced when Carlton got back to London again; for on his arrival at Marseilles he had found cablegrams from his lawyers that had taken him as far as California before he felt free again to go where he would.

But all this time—all the time that he was hearing talk about "original grants," "equities," "section three-forty-six," and things like that—he

was wondering what this had to do with Egypt, with Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn, and, most of all, with a certain English girl named Alice.

There was evidence, even, that the stout and perfectly groomed lawyer—otherwise omniscient—had never so much as heard of the Woman of the Pyramid at all. And as for that thing called metempsychosis!

Carlton still clung to the sapphire. He had tried all sorts of experiments with it—had sat for an hour at a time with it gripped in his hands, trying to "concentrate" on it as he had seen Indian yogis do; had slept with it under his pillow—but all without result.

No, there had been one result.

His relations with Alice Wentworth were decidedly strained; that is, if you can judge by the written word—which you can't do, as a rule.

Two little letters, and that was all. The first, in answer to his own, begged him to return the gem—a delicate hint that to receive and keep "such a valuable present" was, under the circumstances, one of the things that "nobody does."

The second letter, in answer to his reply to the first, briefer even; not very much credence so far as scientific explanations were concerned; a suggestion of long-suffering patience, or hopelessness, of sorrow.

Carlton was inclined to be indignant. Not even a professional psychologist can always penetrate the psychology of the girl he loves; told himself that he had been at pains to make a perfectly clear and frank explanation; the trouble was that Alice wouldn't listen—wouldn't listen, that is, to anything save the dictates of her own heart. Girls, even the most fascinating, were exceedingly trying at times, he had to admit.

Still, his sense of self-justification could not quite overcome a lurking sense of remorse as he walked out of Charing Cross Station and turned up the Strand.

It was one of those evenings when the London climate is at its best—infinitely mild and suave, just smoky enough to soften outlines and harmonize colors. Old-ale atmosphere—at once soothing and mildly stimulating!

Carlton felt an expansion of inner joy. This was where his heart was—he was "home" again.

At his hotel he dressed, ate a tremulous dinner, then summoned a taxi and went out to look for Alice.

He had received no answer to letters or telegrams he had sent since leaving California, but he had no doubt but what he could find her.

Disappointment!

Neither at her own house in Berkeley Square, nor at her Aunt Mary's house in Brook Street, nor yet at another aunt's, where Alice occasionally made her headquarters, in North Row, could he find her.

His one best bet, he told himself, was back at the house in Berkeley Square. There the servants knew him. He knew that they were not lying to him. They had greeted him with the masked but none the less genuine cordiality of their kind.

Miss Alice was out. They weren't sure when she would return, sir. Would he wait? Yes, for a little while.

It seemed now that he had not seen her for centuries. He called himself names. All the time minutes were slipping away—minutes from their precious lives—minutes that they could never, in long eternity, reclaim.

Why had they ever separated at all?

In his pocket his hand came in contact with the small box in which he carried the sapphire. That was the reason. The fact brought a flush of wrath to his cheek, of self-denunciation to his heart. He had hung onto the thing in spite of the danger of it. Now it stood fair to wreck his life.

Science! What was science compared to Alice's happiness and his own? This love of theirs had grown through the centuries, and now, in the name of science, he was ready to chop it down!

Again his hand touched the box. It filled him with a species of horror; the same sort of horror that he had felt when Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn first confronted him, face to face; the same sort of horror he had felt back in ancient Egypt when she had sought to entice him in the pyramid—again in the "City of the White Wall." And he had been such a fool as not to have recognized it!

"I really do not believe, sir—begging your pardon, sir," old Bates began (he knew intuitively how his mistress felt concerning this handsome youth), "that Miss Wentworth will be long."

"Thank you, Bates," Carlton answered; "just a little drive about and I'll be looking back."

But would he?

Something within him told him that the hour had come for him to return the sapphire. It would be now or never.

Do what she would with that polished little blade of steel in her fan—the one she had shown him that day in Shepheard's—the sapphire he would give back to her.

Hadn't it begun already to weave its subtle spell of bad luck about him; to keep him away from Alice; to draw him by cords which he could neither see nor otherwise break into the entanglement that had cost him his own life and the life of the girl he loved, once before, thousands of years ago, in the stifling waters of the Nile?

CHAPTER XI.

FORBIDDEN TERRITORY.

SHOULD she or should she not?

That was the question that had kept revolving in Alice Wentworth's exceedingly attractive head.

Should she take the advice of Aunt Mary—to say nothing of the other aunts—and stay away from Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn altogether, or should she obey the push of every ounce of curiosity and impulse in her heart—as well as incidentally keeping a promise she had once made—and pay the mysterious big house in Park Lane a visit?

To a certain extent, the question had become one of those—like, what is life?—which we keep putting off until we are dead; and even then—who knows?

At first she had roundly sworn that she never would. That was when she had just left Egypt, while she was still under the domination of all the thoroughly unpleasant emotions that her stay in the ancient land had aroused.

Heartache, loneliness, disillusionment!

It was hard to be a woman, so Alice told herself.

But time, to some extent, had soothed, even if it had not healed. Likewise, it brought the galling suspicion that possibly she had been mistaken.

Aunt Rhodopis had given George a jewel of price; but Aunt Rhodopis had a well-established reputation for being eccentric, if nothing else.

She had seen George gazing, entranced, into Lady Rhodopis's green eyes; but the poor boy was really ill at the time—was suffering from the after effects of sunstroke.

The whole situation was too deep for her. She gradually acknowledged the fact; acknowledged it more than ever after she had read those strange letters of Carlton over and over again. But that she should be out of it—anything but that!

Out of the confusion of her thoughts and sentiments had come this certainty; she was waiting.

Waiting for what? She herself could not have told. Aunt Rhodopis was in it—Carlton was in it—this supreme situation which she vaguely felt to be impending. But what it was—this ultimate solution—that she could not or would not say, not even to herself.

She had lost interest in all those things that had interested her before. Not in Constantinople nor Rome nor

Paris—in all of which places she had found happiness before—could she find happiness now. It was the same way with London, the same way with the country places of her friends and relatives to which she was repeatedly invited.

Then, one day, she had turned up those long-spurned letters of Carlton's and had wept over them.

There was no denying the fact: she was homesick for Carlton. After all, what did she understand of the things that he had told her about. She had no head for science, for the psychology of either East or West.

Such things were all right for him.

But all that mattered for her was the outstanding mountain-peak of her love for him—something as old, she told herself, as any mountain-peak, anyway.

And Rhodopis! She had turned him over to the tender mercies of Rhodopis!

She wrote two letters that night—long ones; the first to Carlton himself, the second to the interdicted aunt. Both of them breathed the same spirit, put into them unconsciously—her loneliness, her willingness to forgive, her desire to be in touch with both of them, to fathom, even a little bit, the fathomless future in which they three were cast for important rôles.

It is a pity that the servant to whom these letters were given never posted them—still a pity even if neither of them could have possibly averted the impending tragedy.

One afternoon, Alice, who had just returned from almost a month of constant visiting in the country, went unaccompanied for her drive through Hyde Park.

Old Sedly, who was long in the service of the Wentworths before Alice was born, was about to turn out by Hyde Park corner, when Alice asked him to continue on up the Ring toward the Marble Arch.

Sedly was a bit surprised. It was 'igh time he was getting 'ome to tea. But he gave no sign. Nor did he give any sign a little later on when a still greater surprise befell him.

He had come into Park Lane; was driving slowly down toward Mount Street; was just passing the large house to which, not within the past twenty years, had he driven a member of 'is family, sir, when he received an order to stop.

It was a great house set back somewhat from the street, protected by a high iron fence, of which the gate was closed. But the curtains were up; the place had a general air of being occupied.

Hardly able to believe that it was he who was doing it, Sedly looked at the door of the mansion and raised his whip slightly. Almost instantly the door was opened and a liveried footman had hastened out to where Alice waited.

"Has Lady Rhodopis returned?"

The footman had recognized Sedly, even if he hadn't recognized the lady in the carriage. The card she had placed on his silver tray he had not of course dared to so much as look at—not yet.

"Thank you, ma'am," he answered. "Her ladyship is expected hourly."

"Tell her, please," said Alice, with a feeling almost of panic engendered by her own boldness, "that I shall drop in for a few minutes this evening—unless—unless—"

She took her card again, and penciled a telephone number on it.

The emotion in Sedly's heart was no greater than that in her own. Miss Alice going to see Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn with such spontaneous haste! He wondered if he should not in some way convey the information to higher quarters. He still considered Alice as more or less of a child.

But Alice was not in doubt as to whether she should tell her aunt or not. She was determined that she wouldn't. This was her own affair.

Instead of taking tea with Aunt Mary, as she had promised, she drove

at once to her own home in Berkeley Square, ate dinner there — and not very much of it — in solitary state, wondering what she was going to say, what she was going to wear, what the result of it all would be.

She was frightfully nervous. Of that she was sure. It was as though all those premonitions of hers, all those vague but undeniable intuitions which had been obsessing her ever since she had left Egypt, were taking form, were "materializing," like the ghosts at a spiritualistic séance.

In his comfortable home in the "mews" Sedly was stuffing himself with beefsteak pie. His wife, wholly unlike Sedly himself, was slim and sallow, and, like most thin and sallow people, was inclined to look upon the darker side of things. But this time even Sedly agreed with her.

"You're right, old woman," he kept repeating. "You're right. L'ud blime me, I sez all along as 'ow 'twere goin' to make trouble like."

"Worsener'n trouble," opined Mrs. Sedly cadaverously. "Hit's wot was intentioned w'en the death-spot kept turnin' up all afternoon in those fortune-tellin' cards!"

CHAPTER XLI.

INTO THE SHADOW.

THERE was no doubt at all but what Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn was the victim of forebodings even more than her niece had been—which was only natural perhaps, in view of the fact that her ladyship was not blessed with the clearest conscience in the world.

She had always spent much of her time alone. She was one of those women who are almost always alone, no matter how many people are round. Never before had this innate, unbreakable solitude so weighed upon her.

She was a good deal of a mystery even to herself. She had never been like other children, like other girls, like other women.

A strange career!

A hazy recollection of Europe, of Asia, and of Africa that covered the period of her earliest childhood; a long period in various schools for young ladies, broken by a memorable visit to Abyssinia when she was but sixteen and her presentation to the Negus, who told her that he was her guardian; a year at the half-savage, half-Oriental Aderach, where she had received the best of care, had learned many curious things; then her marriage with the wealthy and once-celebrated Sir Rufus.

No wonder she was superstitious—that is, if by superstition one means the belief in signs and symbols which have no meaning for the generality of people.

But Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn, still not much more than a girl-bride, had known all about it before her husband was brought back to the hotel from a house in Old Cairo that night with his body riddled with dagger-wounds. She had had nothing to do with it — merely knew beforehand that it was going to happen—that was all.

How did she know it? There were still effective ways of looking into the future — for those who know how — both in India and Africa; and the new Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn had acquired most of them. To her such things came as naturally as sewing does to other girls.

Then, amid the unceasing whirl of travel and siege, which had followed since then, she had developed her psychic powers on her own account.

That first visit of hers to England had not been a very great success. She was a widow even then, and the great house in Park Lane, which had been a part of her legacy from the murdered Sir Rufus, had more or less frightened her from the first.

Still more was she frightened the first time that she ever saw her niece, Alice Wentworth.

Frightened at the sight of a pink-and-white, yellow-haired child! Who could explain it?

Lady Rhodopis could—and did!

A handful of black beans in a bowl of rice, and she knew that some day she and this little daughter of the West would stand together in the house of death, and that it was she, Rhodopis, whom death would choose.

Again and again she tested the prediction—by different means highly considered by those who had taught her, but which would be properly barred from the polite literature of the Occident—and the answer was invariably the same.

Fear, panic, distrust, and distress in her unaccustomed surroundings, she had struck at the child one day with a dagger. It wasn't her fault if the little Alice had moved at just the right second, had received nothing worse than a blow from her aunt's wrist.

That was years ago; but neither Rhodopis nor Alice had ever forgotten, naturally.

Then Rhodopis, in one of those peculiar periods of clairvoyance which she could induce at times—but not always—by a certain formula she had acquired before her marriage, came upon the American youth named Carlton, who obviously intended to make Alice Wentworth his wife.

Rhodopis had taken to following Alice about in her dreams as much as possible, certain as she was that their threads of destiny were intertwined.

From the first time she had looked upon him—there in the Savoy dining-room—Rhodopis knew that the third actor in the drama of her life had appeared.

Folks often wonder at the moods of beautiful young women. They wondered enough at the moods of Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn—cruel, passionate, yielding, cold, gay, morose.

She was as much of a mystery to herself as she was to any one else, if the truth be told; and this is apt to be the case with any one who mixes magic and love, as the secret histories of the world fully demonstrate.

And Rhodopis was in love. She made no secret of it even to herself; had acquired that cunning little dagger she always carried with her for no other purpose.

"If we can't live together, then we can die together—he and I, he and I! And after death who can tell? Perhaps the books are wrong. Few wise men—whether they were of different schools of magic or the same—have ever agreed as to just what happens—after death."

Immediately after her scene with Carlton in the tea-room of Shepheard's that day she had gone up to her rooms well-nigh intoxicated with new hope. The old curse was lifted. She could have danced or prayed—did both to some extent, as she worshiped some god or other in a pagan rite she had picked up Lord knows where.

But she was true to form; dropped out of sight for a while. It was never a good thing to press one's luck too hard. A month later found her among her friends at Addis-Ababa.

What happened there? Who can tell? There are powerful magicians still in Ethiopia—the ancient Meroe—who can look into the future as certainly as most people can look into the next room.

Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn left the only real home she had ever known, taking with her a trailing black shadow—a shadow which at times encompassed her about. Moreover, the shadow had a voice. This voice said:

"Until the jewel comes back. I give you until then—until the jewel comes back!"

At which Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn was wont to smile. She was nothing if not courageous. She was a creature of magnificent nerve—something of a tigress, take it all in all.

The shadow dogged her into India, whither she had gone in quest of certain powerful medicine she knew about. She needed it. For some time now she had been unable to project her "double" into the paths she would have had it follow.

She had been shut off from Carlton as effectively as though she were the merest shop-girl. But the moment was approaching — this she knew — when she should see him again; when it would be he or the shadow.

He or the shadow! Both perhaps. She had her dagger; and, as she watched the fateful play of the black beans in the bowl of dry rice, she would smile in that somewhat sad, passionate way of hers.

She had cabled word to London to have her house in Park Lane put in order.

She had never loved the place greatly, but she had gone far to make it less terrible than it had been—had filled it with the things and the symbols that she loved; had, as some had said, made something of a museum of it, so full was it of curios, so Egyptian in its decoration!

Would it not be as good as any other place as a stepping-stone up and out when such a stepping-stone was needed?

CHAPTER XLII.

THREE—AND A FOURTH.

JUST about the same amount of disease and poverty, of vice and crime, in the greatest city of the world—ancient or modern — yet night was settling down over London as sweetly and poetically as though it were Strawberry Hill.

This was especially so in the neighborhood of Hyde Park—a soft breeze, flavored with the smell of geraniums and clipped lawn; stars, coming out dimly through the high overhang of smoky mist; decorous houses with the blinds pulled down, as though everybody was going to bed, which everybody was not of course; but a general impression of quiet eventide.

A strange hour and a strange quarter of the world for any one to be haunted by ghosts and other haunts come out of India and Egypt; and yet this was the case with Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn.

To some extent it was the case likewise with Mr. George Carlton as he turned into Park Lane from the north. It was even more so the case with Alice Wentworth as she turned into Park Lane from the south.

Fate has a habit of pulling on the strings she keeps tied to all of us, bringing two or three—and sometimes another — together when we are the least expecting it.

Only, in this particular instance, one of the puppets on the string was fully expecting it.

As Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn sat before her mirror in the dressing-room of the big house from which she had so long been absent, her first impression was that she was more than ordinarily beautiful.

Yvette, her maid, was *extasiée*, and said so, frankly and volubly, as she fluttered about her mistress like a butterfly about a flower.

A robe of silver gauze with just enough gold in the composition to make it one of exceeding richness. Lady Rhodopis always was daring and original in her dress—never more so than now.

For not only was the dress itself subtly suggestive of old Egypt, but so was her *coiffure*, which was arranged to imitate the double diadem of the Pharaohs—vulture and snake.

A queenlike presence! Cleopatra herself would have been glad to look like that — a gold and silver masterpiece that was even more of the pagan goddess than she was the pagan queen.

Yet, after that first slight glint of satisfaction, Lady Rhodopis felt an instant and profound reaction. It was as though the reflected shadows back of her had taken form, had materialized into the gaunt and shriveled form of a grotesquely tall, thin negro.

She shuddered slightly.

"*Madame a froid?*"

"*Mais non, Yvette!*"

She was thinking of the old, old

horoscope which she herself had cast in this very house, in this very room, years ago, and in which it was written that she and Alice Wentworth should stand together some day in the presence of death, and that death should choose between them.

She sought to cast off her nervousness—lit a cigarette, called for a finger of brandy.

No use!

Once more those shadows reflected in the mirror from the twilit depths just back of her had taken form—the form of a gaunt negro, miraculously tall and thin. But her nerves seemed steadier now.

She studied the apparition. Where in her past had she seen such a one before?

Suddenly she let out a little inarticulae gasp which was neither of regret nor dismay — just surprise, surprise while her fingers mechanically touched the first fold of the fan she carried, made sure that a certain slender bit of steel was there.

She had recognized this thing.

Once, centuries ago, tens of centuries ago, in the Temple of Ptah, another such apparition as this had seized upon her—as certain great spiders of the jungle seize upon brilliant birds—and then—

"Yvette" — softly — "who is it standing there back of us?"

"But no one, *madame*. Yes — oh, it is Fuliaire bringing a card for *madame!*"

Yvette herself had stepped lightly forward and taken the card which Fuller had brought to the door.

"Miss Alice Wentworth!"

"Show her into the blue drawing-room. Tell her I shall be there instantly."

Fuller had gone away with the message.

Lady Rhodopis smiled once more into the mirror. Fuller had gone. It had not been he who cast that shadow there.

Again it loomed up out of the gloom behind her — crooked, black, tall, a burnt pine of a man. Still smiling at the reflected image of the thing—real enough, even if it was unreal—Lady Rhodopis made a slight sign with her finger, such a movement as a Sicilian peasant might make in warding off the evil-eye. But the ominous thing did not disappear.

"You are not feeling quite right," Yvette suggested. "Will *madame* not take a little more of the *fine?*"

"*Mais non, Yvette. Je suis bien.*"

She didn't lie. She was well, in an exalted sort of way. But she knew now that that materialized shadow was real. It was this that she had brought with her out of the ancient land of Ethiopia, of the Meroe she had known in ages past.

In a little while, now, she and Alice Wentworth would be standing, even as she herself had predicted it, in the presence of the sable shadow. One or the other of them would be the elect.

She wasn't frightened. As she cast her last look at herself in the long mirror, she was wondering where George Carlton was. She only wished that he might be there, that he might look upon her while she was dressed like this.

A final touch with one pink-tipped finger, automatically, unconsciously—an old habit of hers—to make sure that the slender blade of steel was hidden in her fan, then she was ready to descend.

Steadily, gracefully, a smile of welcome on her lips, she passed through her bedroom to the corridor which led to the top of the grand staircase. There she paused.

Another visitor had arrived. She heard a man's voice—a voice she recognized — asking whether she was at home.

Then: "Give her ladyship this, please, when you present my card."

She needed no other explanation.

Carlton had brought the sapphire—the Tear of God Ra—the emblem of grief cast down to earth by the father

of all gods when sin first appeared on earth.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"A SHADOW OF THE STAIRS."

SCARCELY had the second footman turned away with the card and the little pasteboard-box which, like Pandora's, was so full of fatefulness, than Carlton heard a glad cry, a beloved voice pronouncing his name.

He turned with an echoing cry springing up from his own heart. Had he thrown off the curse so soon?

Unable to hold back that first impulsive movement of love and joy, fearful almost, even now, that the light of her life might escape again, Alice Wentworth had come to the door of the blue drawing-room, uttered that cry he had heard, then regretted the action just enough to make her blush and wilt with sudden timidity as Carlton saw her.

"Alice!"

"George!"

About the entrance-hall of Trevelyn House the genius of the present owner had reared a series of Egyptian gods—lofty, placid, chaste and passionless—all of them staring out into eternity with the same expression as that worn by the sphinx, by the great Harmachis, father of terrors.

But even their graven ears must have tingled a little at the magical vibrations set astir as the two young people standing there pronounced each other's names.

It was more than just mere love—great as that love was. There was something of tremendous relief in it, as well—as though each had stood in the presence of death, had seen, each in the other, an earnest of salvation.

Alice had stepped forward to greet him after that first moment of exquisite hesitation. He had gone forward to meet her, had seized her hands in his own.

They murmured the same words they might have used, thousands of years ago, back there in the subterranean treasure-palace under the Temple of Ptah in the City of the White Wall—then when they stood in the presence of tragedy and, none the less, smiled into each other's eyes.

Did the memory of that remote hour return to them now? Who can tell?

The place where they stood was ablaze with light. But, somehow, it was as though they were suddenly enveloped in a special atmosphere of mystery. It was as though they two were all alone—spectators who wait—amid a sort of dead calm.

Not knowing or questioning why he did it, Carlton put his arms round Alice and drew her close.

She didn't protest — surrendered herself. Their hearts were beating wildly; but they both said afterward that there was more of elation in it than fear—the solemn joy of a judgment hour.

Then they turned.

The fraction of a second only, but they had stood there expectant — sure only of this, that they were together, and so would always remain. Then it came—a small sound, yet fearfully great in that tense, surcharged silence and suspense.

A human cry, otherwise indescribable!

It was as though all the pain and all the joy in the world had sought utterance at the same instant through the voice of a single creature, of a single woman.

At the head of the grand staircase they saw Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn appear—a vision of beauty, yet sinister, unearthly, cruel. An apparition from a dream, rather than a London hostess descending to welcome her guests; a vision out of Old Egypt, of the Isis on earth!

She had smiled at them; had stood there holding in her hand the little box that Carlton had sent to her.

A flash of steel; then a gaunt black shadow, which enveloped her as she

fell, stifled that fearful cry they had heard.

They both saw it—that shadow. It had appeared so suddenly out of the black-and-gold silk hangings, and a moment later it was gone again. Yet both had recognized it—even Alice—for in that flash of terror she recollected something that heretofore had lain buried—oh, at a fathomless depth—in the deepest, uttermost cells of her brain.

This, then the vision of a reeling, frightened man servant, and Alice had buried her face in Carlton's shoulder.

Followed, for her at least, a swift period when it was as though the waters of the Nile — or the Thames — were rushing in to submerge her; and through it all the consciousness that there was some one at her side to whom she clung; some one who whispered that Rhodopis was dead — or was it Netokris?—but that they were safe and would live forever, come what would.

CHAPTER XLIV.

CONCLUSION.

"Do you want something new in the way of novels, my dear friend?" This is a quotation from Jules Claretie. "Extraordinary novels, filled with incredible adventures which, at the same time, are absolutely true? Then read the books wherein scientists tell you what occurs in the human brain!"

Alice Wentworth Carlton, a year or so after the events recorded in this history, came across that extract from some preface or other written by the French Immortal, and agreed with him perfectly.

She had come to understand many things, to take a larger outlook on life in general, had come to look with complacency even on the fact that her husband divided his devotion between her own sweet self and his science.

That's not always the way with the bride of a month or so—or of a decade or so. Though, of course, it should be.

The suicide of the beautiful Lady Rhodopis Trevelyn had been a tremendous sensation for a week or so. But it was so thoroughly in keeping with everything else that was known of her mysterious, tempestuous character that no one greatly wondered.

The house in Park Lane, and all that was in it, is the property of Alice now; but she and her husband will never live in it. They have turned it over to become an embassy, or something like that. Anyway, a rich American has taken it and is giving occasional fabulous entertainments there.

If it is true—as it is whispered—that the wraith of the lovely and tragic Lady Rhodopis sometimes appears before the guests at these entertainments, now in the guise of a queen of Old Egypt, now in the shimmering silver dress she wore on the night of the tragedy, that is but another element in rendering these entertainments so notable.

She has never appeared like that before Alice or George. For which they are grateful.

For that matter, no one, since the death of Lady Rhodopis, has ever seen again the fabled Woman of the Pyramid. There were many who tried to do so—more than ever because, somehow, the tradition got abroad that she was that—

> Bright, unearthly nymph who dwells
> 'Mid sunless gold and jewels hid,
> The Lady of the Pyramid.

It was to Egypt that Carlton and his bride returned for their wedding tour—a pilgrimage, as much as anything else. Secretly, they both trembled a little at the prospect of what might happen to them there, but they found that the ancient land was robbed of its terror, was robbed even of much of its mystery.

Perhaps this was because they understood so many things not under-

stood by most of the tourists who visit the Nile.

It was even something like a visit to the old homestead that afternoon they went over to the site of ancient Memphis.

Nothing now to mark the great metropolis they had known, scarcely a remnant of the "City of the White Wall" save a fallen statue, a palm-grove, a squalid village where peasants lived out their mud-covered, sun-baked lives—these and the eternal pyramids.

"All changed," whispered Alice—"all changed save them and us."

"Lord—the faith and the knowledge that went into them!" Carlton exclaimed. "No wonder they are everlasting!"

"But see, we also are everlasting."

"Ah, that's because we represent something else which never dies. We represent—"

He cast a quick and furtive glance around them. Every one else, even the Arabs, had found momentary absorption in the colossal statue of the great Ptah, fallen centuries ago. No one was looking.

"We represent this."

Carlton hastily bent his head and kissed Alice on the lips.

(The End.)

Curious Cubes

By T. Bell

YOU might camp out on the Great American Desert for days and days and nothing worthy of comment would happen.

At the junction of Thirty-Fourth Street, Sixth Avenue and Broadway something happens every two and one-half minutes, or twice every five minutes, wherein that vicinity differs vastly from the Great American Desert.

This is no reflection on the G. A. D., but such are the facts, and must be so set down as hereinbefore provided and contained in the minutes of this meeting.

First, a fire-engine came tearing up Broadway.

Second, a cab-horse, for reasons known only to cab-horses and possibly to traffic policemen — though I have never inquired of one—lay down on the car-tracks.

Then all the trucks, street-cars, automobiles, ambulances, and fire-fighting apparatus in the vicinity became inextricably entangled in a true lover's-knot, so that a common, ordinary Mexican ant could not have made its way out of the mass.

In company with hundreds of other New Yorkers who are so busy neglecting their own business that they have time to mind every one else's, I paused and surveyed the scene of disorder.

Suddenly a cry broke from the lips of the assembled multitude (I got this phrase out of a book—rather good—eh, what?) and I looked in the direction toward which all eyes were turned.

There, in the very core and center of the hub-locked mess of traffic was a little old man, caught like a rat in a trap. He darted up, under, over, and above, through, outside, inside, and across, beneath the hoofs of prancing steeds, narrowly escaping death by hairbreadths, and then, just as he was about to drag himself clear of the whole business, some invisible force set the congested mass in motion and he would have been crushed beneath the wheels of an expensive, red automobile had I not dashed forward and pulled him to his feet.

It all happened in a moment.

He leaned heavily against me, grasping my arm. I steadied him and slowly forced him through the crowd now rapidly reducing itself to fragments. When we hit an open space he looked up into my face with gratitude.

"Young man," he said in a small, thin, weak, trembling voice, "you have saved my life."

"Don't mention it," I said airily, brushing myself off. "It was a rare pleasure, I assure you."

"I am disposed to reward you." He regarded me thoughtfully, the while he stroked his long, luxurious, King Leopold beard. "Yes," he went on, "I shall reward you. It is fitting and proper."

"Please," I said modestly, "don't think of such a thing. I really won't permit it."

We walked slowly down Broadway. He was leaning on my arm and I was heartily wishing I could drop him in some polite, convenient manner.

"Let us step into this hotel," he said as we passed one of those gilded sin-palaces for which Broadway is noted from the rock-bound coast of the Pacific to the pine-clad hills of Maine. "I wish to present you with a token of my gratitude which knows no bounds."

"Now—really—" I protested feebly; but he led me through the portal—decorated like a ticket-wagon at a circus—and into the lobby.

"Now," he said, after we were seated in deep, leather-covered chairs, "I shall ask you to tell me your name so that I may engrave it on the tablets of my memory."

"J. Harvey McNuder," I replied.

"And I," he said, grasping my hand, "am Professor Horace Maxwell. You have saved my life. You have saved a benefactor of the human race—the inventor of—but wait."

He drew a small, glittering object from his waistcoat-pocket and handed it to me. It looked like a lump of sugar wrapped in tinfoil.

"That little thing," he went on, "is a cube of congeniality.

"Listen," he continued as I observed the thing in wonder, "and I will explain.

"I have discovered a method of solidifying the psychic elements in the atmosphere, a subject to which I have devoted my life. At last I have triumphed. That cube, and several others I have with me, are the result."

"You're too far over in the book for me," I said. "I don't make you, professor. May I unwrap it and take a look?"

"Not yet," he protested. "Allow me to continue.

"You have frequently noticed, I presume, that certain states of mind are infectious. For instance, one man carries about him an air of gloom, another an air of prosperity. Such a man visibly affects those about him. He enters a company and his presence is felt and noticed. Shortly the company becomes infected with the atmosphere of the strongest personality in it; this atmosphere expands until it may be said that one man has dominated—by what we call personality—those around him. Is this true?"

"Well—yes," I replied slowly, "I'd never thought about it that way. I fail, however, to understand—"

"Very well," he returned with dignity. "Now this cube"—he took it from me—" is a cube of congeniality. I secured its ingredients from the atmosphere in a room where six prominent politicians were seated at damp, round tables in the back of a café, 'dividing the swag,' as they say. Naturally the atmosphere was heavily charged with congeniality.

"This man," I said to myself, "is crazy. Far better had I permitted him to become a victim of the rich, red motor-car."

"This cube," he went on excitedly, drawing another from his pocket, "is what I call a cube of prosperity. The ingredients of this were procured from the office of a prominent railway king whose name I may not divulge. Suffice to say he has millions of dollars at his command. He is one of the richest men in the world."

"Really," I thought to myself again. "I ought to turn old gray-beard over to a policeman."

"And this," he produced another, "is a cube of gloom, and was the result of attending the World's Series at the Polo Grounds in nineteen twelve when the Giants lost the pennant. It is the one most highly charged, and will, therefore, be the most highly efficient."

"Very interesting," I murmured, edging away from him ever so little and casting about for a means of escape.

"I am going to give you one specimen of each of these," he said, placing them in my hand. "I can confer no greater gift on you for the service you have performed in my behalf this day. You have saved my life."

"How do they—they work?" I asked, merely to humor him. "Just pour hot water and serve?"

"Do not jest," he warned me, laying a thin, cold, blue-white hand on my shoulder. "Simply remove the tinfoil. Contact with the atmosphere will do the rest. The cube will gradually disappear. The effect is temporary and immediate."

"Thank you," I said, thrusting the three cubes in my coat-pocket. "I accept these with pleasure." I looked at the big clock at the far end of the lobby. "I must be going along. It's getting late."

"I, too, must proceed on my way," the old man rose stiffly. "Allow me to grasp you by the hand again, young man. You have saved my life. In return I have conferred upon you a marvelous triumph of science. Use it with discrimination."

He moved away and presently I lost sight of him in the throng that eddied and surged through the corridor of the hotel.

"Well," I said to myself, "I've wasted some time on this loose-beaned, elderly person. It is five o'clock. I will go up home, dress, and—"

Then I heard my name called.

The speaker was Joe Mellish, for whom I have slight regard.

"Hello, Joe," I greeted him. "How's your conduct?"

"Great," he replied, grasping me by the hand. "Have you heard the news?"

"Nothing to speak of," I replied.

"I'm engaged."

He said this as one would say "I have been elected President of the United States," or "The world is mine," or some other large, high-priced remark.

"Put it there." I shook hands with him again. "Miss Borden, I suppose. Fine girl, lucky man. Have a drink."

We stepped into the café and spoke certain mysterious words to the white-coated gentleman behind the bar, who presently laid before us two portions of a wet, intoxicating fluid.

"Pulled it last night," Joe said in a joyous tone of voice. "She snapped me up like a bargain. I guess I ain't a lucky guy—what?"

"Oh," I said, "you're simply poisoned with luck. I don't see how you'll ever be able to die when your time comes."

"Well"—he expanded his chest con-

siderably—" you got to give me credit, Harve, for picking the sweetest, finest, most good-looking, all-round member of the obstinate sex in these here parts. Gimme credit, will you?"

"Sure," I replied. "I ain't like a fellow that's the least bit jealous, you know, even though I was once—well, —kind of sweet on the lady myself."

"I beat you to it," he said complacently as he made a motion to the dispenser behind the long, moist mahogany. "Same?" he asked condescendingly.

"Yes, same for me," I answered, and suddenly I longed to damage the gigantic assurance of this person.

It was then that I thought of the cubes in my pocket—those marvels of science — triumphs of the inventor's art, *et cetera.*

I surreptitiously took them out to look at them, and suddenly became aware of the fact that there was nothing by which to identify one from the other.

"Oh, well," I said to myself, "it's likely they are only the work of a nut, so it won't make much difference, anyway."

I unwrapped one and dropped it in Joe's pocket.

"There's no use talking," Joe said as he sipped his drink, "this getting married is a serious proposition. For one thing, marriage without love is an awful lemon, so they tell me. Of course Janet loves me," he took another sip.

"Nothing could save him," I thought to myself, "if we were in a dark alley and I had an ax with me."

"But sometimes I feel as if—well, maybe she don't love me, Harve; and —I—oh, what the dickens!"

He set his glass down on the bar while a tear formed in the corner of his eye and rolled down the side of his nose.

"Say," I cried, "what's the matter with you?"

"I don't know," he lamented, wiping his eyes with his handkerchief; "but I feel so— Say, Harve, do I look like a human being?"

"You bear slight chemical traces of belonging to the human race," I replied. "Why?"

"She don't love me," he said finally as he wiped his eyes again. "I feel it, Harve, and it's awful. I didn't feel this way before, but now—"

He burst out crying.

"What are you going to do about it?" I said. "Don't weep all over this perfectly good café, that never did a thing to either of us. Come outside."

I led him, weeping, to the door.

"Do me a favor, Harve," he sobbed when we were outside, where we attracted unfavorable comment. "Go up to the Bordens to-night and tell Janet that you've seen me and that I— oh, she won't care, anyway—but tell her that I am on my way to bleach my bones in the desert places of the earth. Some day she will—she will regret that she—I— Oh, Harve, go to her and tell her that."

"I'll go," I said with an air of resignation.

"Yes, go"—he clung to me—"and take her, Harve. She loves you. I feel it. Go to her—take her, and— and be good to her for my sake. And when you lead her to the altar—you will lead her to the altar, won't you?"

"Perhaps," I replied, gently disengaging him from my shoulder, which was damp from his tears.

"When you lead her to the altar and—and—think of me, will you, Harve? And teach her to think kindly of the man who loves her, and always will love her so long as she— tell her that, will you, Harve?"

"I will." I spoke gently.

"Go," he wailed. "And if the Giants—the Red Sox win the pennant —I—what am I saying?"

So it was the cube! The baseball game was showing through!

"Nothing," I said gently. "You were saying positively nothing."

"I thought so," he returned as I moved away hurriedly.

I lost no time in reaching the Borden residence, which is tucked away in the vest-pocket of Harlem.

Janet met me at the portals.

"Why, how do you do, Mr. McNuder?" she exclaimed. "This is indeed a surprise!"

"Isn't it?" I said affably as we entered the little two-by-four parlor.

"You never come up here any more," she pouted very prettily. "Am I honored in believing that you came to-night just to see my humble self?"

"Honored is scarcely the word," I smiled upon her. "I am performing a duty," I said.

"Oh, how wretched!" she cried. "That's such a terrible word to use."

"Well, I couldn't think of a better one." I unwrapped one of the two remaining cubes.

"It don't make much difference," I said to myself as I turned loose another triumph of science. "It won't make much difference whether it's Prosperity of Congeniality. Women fall for either or both."

"Do tell," she chided me. "What is the nature of this duty, may I ask?"

"Certainly," I replied. "I have just left Joe down-town!"

"Something has happened to him!" She rose and came over to me. "Tell me at once!"

"It's really nothing," I replied calmly. "He told me to tell you that he is on his way to—to some desert or other, because he thinks you don't love him or he don't love you, or something of the sort. I couldn't just get the hang of it."

"Great Heavens, the man is mad!" She dropped into a chair.

"So I thought maybe you'd like to come out with me to-morrow afternoon for a spin in my motor-car."

(I had no motor-car.)

"It's very good of you." She spoke brokenly. "I—yes—I will come."

"And," I went on madly, "perhaps some day you will think kindly of one who wishes to make you the happiest woman in the world."

"Please don't speak of it yet," she whispered.

"Why not?" I replied, impetuously taking both her little white hands in mine. "I can give you everything—everything in the world that your heart craves.

"I will build a palace for you as high as the skies; you shall have a thousand servants to do your bidding; jewels, motor-cars, opera-boxes, yachts, European trips—I lay them all—all at your feet."

I suited the action to the word by laying an imaginary universe on the carpet before her.

"Why, Mr. McNuder," she blushed very, very attractively, "I had no idea you were so—so rich."

"Rich!" I cried, abandoning myself to the triumph of science. "Rich! The half has not been told. Name it and you can have it. That's my motto. I do nothing by halves — positively nothing.

"For you, Janet, I will turn the world wrong side out and paint the other side red, like your lips. I will reach up and pluck a star for you to wear in a ring. You may have the moon with which to decorate your alabaster brow.

"There is nothing in the wide, wide world—in the wide, wide universe—that you shall not have, if money can buy it. And," I added complacently, "money can buy anything."

"Where did you get all this money?" she asked.

"Have no fear on that score," I replied airily. "Picture to yourself a thousand miles of steel rails girdling the continent. Picture the vast, comprehensive railway system that brings San Francisco next door to New York, and then ask me—me—where I got all this money!"

I still held her hands in mine.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Why—I never knew, I never dreamed of anything so wonderful! You must be—"

"They call me the railroad king," I said modestly.

In another moment she would have been mine.

But that moment never arrived, for I heard a great clatter outside in the hall, as if twenty men were simultaneously trying to enter and pull the house in after them.

I looked up. Joe stood in the doorway.

He took in the situation at a glance, and I hurriedly slipped off the covering of the one remaining cube — the cube of Congeniality.

Janet ran to him and grasped him in what I believe to be a half-Nelson, a wrestling term.

"Let me at him!" Joe cried. "The —the—hound!"

"Don't," I said with dignity. "Keep away. I shall explain."

Joe tossed Janet gently to the far end of the room and advanced on me.

"You explain!" he hissed. "I'll muss you up first, and then do your explaining afterward!"

He did. I didn't.

Outside, I slowly and painfully arranged my attire and discovered that I could actually see out of one eye, which was a great relief to me.

The bright lights of a café on the corner attracted my attention. I slipped in through the side door labeled "Family Entrance," though why they should so label a side door I have never been able to discover, because I never saw nor heard of a family entering such a place.

The room was deserted except for one man who was asleep.

The waiter entered and brushed off the table at which I sat.

"Bring me some pens and ink and paper," I ordered.

Was I mad? What was the reason for this bursting, throbbing sensation in my head? Of course, it might have been on account of having come in violent contact with the United States when Joe Mellish (curse him) hurled me through the front door.

And, anyway—the desire to write!

Me, a poor slave of a thieving corporation, suddenly seized with a mania for pen, ink, and paper! Horrible thought! I wondered if there was such a thing as an ink-drunkard!

He went out and presently returned with them.

"Now," I said, "bring me a forty-horse-power rye highball, and then let me alone."

I wrote until far into the night.

A month afterward I ran into Professor Maxwell on Broadway.

I drew him aside.

"See this eye?" I said. "Well, it's better now, but you ought to have seen it when it was fresh."

I told him what had happened.

"Everything worked like a charm," I said, "except that blamed cube of Congeniality. It's a frost."

"Not so," he replied kindly. "I found, after I had returned home, that I had included by mistake a cube of Literary atmosphere which was secured at the home of Rudyard Kipling while that master was engaged in a most difficult piece of literary labor. That accounts for your having written the story of your experiences.

"Allow me to present you with my latest triumph of science, the cube of Courage. It was secured by me at the exact moment when you saved my life, a service for which I feel that I cannot sufficiently repay you.

"Accept it, please, as a final testimony of my gratitude. I leave for Europe to-morrow, and we shall probably never meet again."

"Thank you just the same, professor," I said. "But I've had all the experience I want with your cubes, which, I may say, are all that you claim for them."

"Take it, young man." He thrust it into my hand. "Use it when you present your literary masterpiece to an editor for publication."

Under the circumstances I accepted it, with the result that you observe the story in print.

I fear I shall never write another.

The Smoldering Past

by Francis William Sullivan

CHAPTER I.

THE HOISTED OARS.

IN front of the lighthouse on Swallow Tail Point there is a plot of thin earth twenty feet in length by ten in width. Beyond this is a sheer hundred-foot drop to the wet, black rocks and swirling surf.

Behind it rises the snowy octagon of the lighthouse, reached by a narrow path, and, to right and left, not far distant, grim, perpendicular cliffs whose feet are in the sea.

Swallow Tail Light adorns the splintered point of a spire of gray granite standing farther eastward than any other rock on the whole island of Grand Manan.

On the little plat of thin earth two boys sat trying to chafe warmth into their bare legs; for, though it was mid-July, the day was gloomy and chill.

It was a melancholy panorama they looked out upon.

Eastward the liquid lead of the cold North Atlantic stretched away infinitely; northward rolled the Bay of Fundy, alive with fish and unnatural with monstrous tides and vicious gales; southward, the gray gave birth to a string of dull, densely wooded islands called, successively, Long, High Duck, Low Duck, and Big Duck.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon, and the fishing fleet would not be in from the Banks until four. From their point of vantage the lads could dimly see nearly twoscore black dots bounding a segment of the gray expanse to the northeast, where were the fishing-grounds. These were the motor-dories and sloops out of North Head, the little village tucked round the point.

Even as the lads strained their practised eyes in an endeavor to identify their fathers' craft, one scrambled to his knees with a sudden shout.

"I believe they're comin' in!" he cried. "What fer at this time o' day, I wonder?"

His companion, less loquacious, sat motionless as an image as he pierced the distance.

"Yep, they're comin'!" he agreed excitedly. "An' there's oars up!"

"What!"

The first speaker turned back to look again.

"By golly, you're right!" he shouted. "Quick, Jack! Let's run home

an' tell folks. They ain't carried an oar in the air since the time they f'und Bill Barlow's dory bottom-up off the Bulkhead Rip!"

The two boys scrambled up the rocky declivity to the lighthouse, shouted the news to the keeper, and went on their way. The keeper snatched his glasses and raised them to his eyes.

Out on the restless gray five craft were racing homeward, all throwing back curls of foam from their high, tapered bows. In three of them a man sat holding an oar perpendicularly upright—a warning to those on shore that something extraordinary had happened. In the fourth boat there were three men, one at the engine and two bending over something in the bottom.

The keeper put down his glasses and walked to the old-fashioned telephone in his near-by dwelling. Two long and four short rings got him the one doctor on the island, an elderly native living in Castalia Village, three miles south. Asa Poole declared he would start for North Head as soon as he could hitch up.

Meanwhile the two boys raced homeward. Running, they crossed the wire suspension bridge that spanned a chasm, and left it trembling and humming behind. Then, like mountain-goats, they leaped up a winding path pitched at a desperate angle along the side of Swallow Tail Point.

Opposite to them, a quarter of a mile away, was the tip of Long Island, which, with Swallow Tail, formed the entrance to the tiny, rock-infested harbor. West and south stretched the simitar-shaped bay, and now, from the tip of the blade, came the gleam of afternoon sun reflected from the tiny white houses of Castalia.

Parallel with the bay and also running south, the green, pine-covered mountain that formed the backbone of the island could be seen disappearing into the gray and purple distance.

The path steepened, the lads pounded up the shoulder of rock with distended nostrils and clenched fists, reached the summit, and trotted down upon the village of North Head.

They saw an old crone on the edge of the forest gathering pine-cones and punk.

"Dories comin' in with the oars up!" panted one.

"Yes—yes, all right," croaked the hag, muttering to herself.

Now they reached the first street. On either side were little one or two-story frame cottages, all sadly in need of fresh paint. Some were a withered brown color, others had the disreputable, soiled look that betokens former whiteness, and still others were the black-gray of no paint at all.

About some there were evidences of half-hearted caretaking. Worm-eaten, paint-flaked picket-fences with sagging gates surrounded their front yards. Others offered merely unenclosed tangles of long grass. But all had the common look of poverty and decay.

In front of each lay a broken dory filled with earth and overrun with yellowed, insect-eaten geraniums or nasturtiums; while behind were long lines of wire laden with what appeared to be bits of drying meat. These in reality were cod "sounds" (the air-bladders of the fish), and were to be sold at the isinglass factory on the mainland.

It was Monday, and slatternly women in gray wrappers were gathering meager washings in the rear of the cottages, at the same time keeping an eye on the dirty children that played about the broken dories.

To these the lads screamed their news. The effect was startling. Immediately the women, picking up the infants and marshaling the other children, started along the road toward the landing.

"I wonder whose man it is this time?" they asked one another fearfully as they met.

The women were mostly young, but their faces belied the fact. Their eyes were large and held the flicker

of a constant discouragement. Their cheeks were hollow and their thin hair had lost its luster.

When they smiled their mouths had a peculiar distortion due to the fact that their teeth were gone, or what remained were merely black and broken stumps. Poverty, child-bearing, illness, and unceasing labor had in a few short years robbed them of youth, beauty, and any faint illusion.

By the time the boys, panting and exhausted, had reached Boughton's general store the dusty road behind them was filled with women and children.

There were supposed widows whose men had sailed out in fierce gales and never returned, and who hoped despairingly against hope that now some miracle might have restored them. There were brides from whom the beauty had not yet faded, clasping their hands in fear, and there were older women, more controlled, who had looked upon grief and tragedy until it no longer seemed to move them.

Now there came a faint sound as of rapid-fire guns in mountain practise. It was the multiplicate volley of unmuffled exhausts from the approaching dories. Back and forth from headland to headland the sounds reverberated, and women far behind along the road hurried, for they knew the boats had rounded Swallow Tail Point.

Bill Boughton's general store, a large, ramshackle, frame building, graced North Head's center of industry—the wharfs and fish-houses. Its rear approached within two hundred feet of the water. To the left, behind it, the little steamboat-pier with its covered sheds stalked out into the bay on gaunt, black legs. The tide was low and the piles were covered with plastered moss and barnacles.

Still farther to the left was a desolate, blackened area out of which, phœnixlike, rose the ponderous figure of a blistered and scarified iron safe. Near by were charred timbers and bits of broken trestle that had formerly been fish-drying racks.

These were the sole remains after the disastrous fire that visited the village a month before, destroying the bank, the Dominion cable office, and two fish-stands with their full salt-bins. Since the fire North Head had been cut off from any communication with the mainland except by steamer.

To the right behind Boughton's store was the principal remaining stand. Now that the tide was out piles of backbones and offal from the cleaned fish lay exposed on the bottom under the pier where they had been thrown from the dressing-tables. The air had affected these, and over the whole locality hung a wreek of decayed fish, of cod-oil trying in open casks, and slimy barrels, of fresh salt.

Now the approaching boats were very near, and the women, along with a few men who had been lounging in the store or baiting trawl on the wharf, crowded down to the water's edge.

Round the end of the steamer-pier surged the dories, nearly abreast. The upraised oars were lowered, the engines suddenly thrown into the reverse, and the high-prowed little craft slid easily up on the stony beach.

"Give us a hand here, some of you!" cried a voice from the fourth dory, and booted men from the others leaped into the shallow water, splashing as they walked.

Together they gathered up a limp, inert body and carried it awkwardly ashore.

"Whose man is it?" shrilled a high, hysterical voice back among the silent women.

"'Tain't nobody from the island," boomed a big man who was bending over the body.

A sigh of relief and relaxation went up and the crowd fell back.

"Who is he?" came another voice.

"Dunno," was the reply. "Not from these parts by the look of him; ner from St. John way, neither. Say, Boughton, fetch daown that loose door

o' yourn. Guess we'll take him up to my place. Somebody send for the doctor—he's still alive."

"Doctor's comin' now," announced a man who had been apprised over the telephone in the store by the light-house-keeper.

The women divided to let Boughton drag the door down to its burden. The helpless form was lifted upon it and two men—one, he of the big voice, Randy Masters—raised it carefully with many "stiddys" and "belays" from the others, and marched up the declivity toward the road.

The women, morbidly curious, peered over one another's shoulders as the strange procession passed.

"Good-lookin' young feller," said one, catching a glimpse of the young face and curly brown hair. "Wonder where he come from?"

"Big, too, ain't he?"

The man's feet and head reached both ends of the six-foot door.

"Ain't no fisherman, by the looks of him."

Aside from the murmurs in the crowd and the clumping of the men's boots over the stones, there was silence.

As though fascinated, the women and wide-eyed children followed slowly toward the little pink cottage a hundred yards westward along the King's Road.

CHAPTER II.

FLOTSAM.

THE rickety gateway to the cottage was blocked by a slim girl who had watched the advance upon her premises with stolid indifference. Her nearly black hair ran in a tangled riot over her head. She was brown as a berry, but her already tired eyes and drooping mouth showed that the inevitable stamp of the island women was being set upon her face.

As she stood between the quaking gate-posts, a hand on each, the poverty of her stuff dress, soiled at neck and wrists and tattered at hem, was painfully apparent. And yet there was a set—a hang to the ugly thing that gave more indication of the girl's character than all the external appearances in the world. It suggested uncompromising defiance to the world.

A shiny leather belt confining it snugly at the waist showed the curves of a figure that gave promise of great beauty.

Beneath her skirt dusty stockings showed, and her noticeably little feet were encased in a pair of run-over last year's shoes fully three sizes too large.

Without moving she allowed the men bearing the body of the newcomer to come to a full stop before her.

"What're you bringin' that stale one in here for, dad?" she asked.

"Never mind your fool questions, Betty," rumbled Masters, fixing the girl with a level glare. "You tell your ma to make that livin'-room lounge comfortable. An' hustle!"

For a moment the girl and the man measured glances. Then her eyes fell, and she moved slowly toward the house, the men following her with their burden.

The long-neglected gravel path was rank with weeds and overgrown along the edges. Chickens scratched and clucked under foot. The grass in the yard was the same length as that in the half-acre hay-field just beyond the fence and would be cut at the same time. Here and there were huge white bones the dog had forgotten to bury, and dull red or brown spots denoted fallen apples rotting under the trees.

From inside the house came the sound of a harsh voice shouting commands. Then the marchers carefully mounted the creaking and sagging steps. Here the makeshift stretcher was dispensed with and the two fresh men bore the stranger along the narrow, gloomy hallway until a door was opened on the left, and the same harsh voice bade them enter.

A red plush couch had been dragged

into a little bay window on the east side of the room, and here the burden was finally deposited, the men easing their backs by swaying to and fro from the hips.

"My soul an' body, Randy!" cried Sally Masters, the middle-aged woman of the harsh voice. "This is a fine thing to do of a Monday afternoon when we're just gittin' in the wash!"

She flashed him a resentful glance that came grotesquely from one whose graying hair was parted in the middle and strained back on each side as smooth as a peeled onion.

A noise of some one coming in the door interrupted Randy's caustic reply and caused them all to turn just as Asa Poole, the doctor, entered the room.

In his time Dr. Poole had trodden so many paths of medicine—homeopath, allopath, *et cetera*, as each came in—that now he claimed only an ability to do "plain healing," and that by whichever method seemed best in the immediate case.

Laying his generation-old high hat on a chair, he approached the figure on the couch, his worn, black medicine-case in his hand. Quickly he made an examination.

One side of the young man's face was blackened as though from burn, and the upper part of his garments showed similar damage. His hands were black, but from another cause—plain dirt and grease. As to broken bones, the doctor could not tell at once, but determined to spare the stranger possible pain by finding out previous to restoring him to consciousness.

"All women out of the room, please," he ordered.

Sally Masters, a thirsting gossip, went reluctantly. Betty, who had slipped in unobserved to view the stranger, and who was no gossip at all, also went reluctantly. The doorway of the living-room was already crowded with the sallow, curious faces of neighbors who had stolen into the hall.

While two of the men chafed the stranger's extremities and bathed his head, Poole and Randy Masters stripped off his soggy clothing.

"How d' you find him?" asked the doctor.

"Jimmie Thomas an' me, here, was hand-linin' pretty close to the southern edge o' the shoal, but we couldn't find no fish. Everybody else was gittin' powers of 'em, so we figgered we'd leebow the hull crew. We went up no'th-east until we was a quarter of a mile beyond, near the no'thern edge of the bank.

"The fish they struck on good—they's twenty-five to twenty-eight fathom there—an' we wasn't doin' much but haul 'em in, when all of a sudden I looked up an' here was this lad bobbin' down on me with the first of the flood tide. 'T first I thought he was a stale one, like Betty did, but somehow he looked diff'rent.

"Me an' Jimmy got him in as quick's we could an' we f'und he was alive. Then we made tracks fer home. Some of the boys was loaded, anyway, and they come along with us, hoistin' the oars. Mighty queer findin' him there."

"But how did this chap keep afloat? Why didn't he drown?" asked the doctor, commencing to work the naked body in search of broken bones.

"Had a life-presarver on, for one thing, an' besides that, he was kind of restin' on a bit of plank. We took the presarver off comin' in, but we was so excited we didn't look at the plankin'. That floated away."

There was silence in the bare little room as Poole worked.

"All sound from head to foot," he announced presently, straightening up. "Now to get him conscious."

He opened his bag and drew forth a bottle. Filling a spoon with brandy from it he forced the liquid down the stranger's throat, then covering him with a ragged afghan, he labored for half an hour at artificial respiration, repeating the doses of stimulant at frequent intervals.

At last color returned to the pallid,

unburned check, and some time later a pair of blank, perfectly conscious gray eyes looked up at the doctor. There was a sigh.

"Good-morning. What's all this?" asked the stranger in a calm, well-modulated voice.

"Steady now. You're all right. Just keep quiet," cautioned Poole.

"What's the matter— Oh, my face!"

The other raised a mystified hand to his cheek.

"Burned, I guess. Quiet now, I'm going to fix it."

Poole put some vaseline and healing ointment on a pad of antiseptic cotton and bound it deftly with a bandage.

"Where am I?"

The gray eyes wandered curiously about the dingy room, resting, in turn, on the soiled, cobwebbed walls, the black walnut "what-not" with its Bermudan coral behind unwashed glass, the sleazy cotton curtains, the cheap oak table, and the stiff, black chairs.

"On Grand Manan Island, New Brunswick. Here, drink this," said Poole.

He had shaken a white powder into a little brandy and water, and handed it to the other.

"Now," went on the doctor, when the dose had been swallowed, "don't ask so many questions, young feller. I want to ask you a few before you go to sleep. What's your name?"

"Name?" A look of bewilderment passed over the face of the injured man. "I don't know."

"Come now! Think."

There was a pause.

"I—I can't think, doctor," was the plaintive, hesitating reply.

Poole stopped in the business of re-arranging his bag and looked at the other with astonishment written large on his broad face.

"Well, then, never mind your name," he said cheerfully. "Where were you before the thing happened that knocked you out?"

Again the look of puzzled bewilderment.

"I—I don't know, doctor."

"Where is your home?"

"Right here, isn't it? I don't know of any home." He started to yawn, but a twinge of pain stopped him. "I'm awfully sleepy, doctor; let me go to sleep."

"In just a second. Tell me now, think before you answer. What is your name, where did you come from, what were you doing before you got here, and what are the names of any of your friends?"

For perhaps a full half-minute the man lay absolutely quiet. To the tense listeners it seemed as though he were engaged in some desperate battle against a blind, overwhelming force. The eyes became wild and the body stiffened.

"God, I can't remember a thing!" burst from him at last.

There was a sigh, a relaxation, the lids dropped down, and in a few seconds he was sleeping heavily.

In the little room the only sound was the loud ticking of an old mahogany clock that stood on a shelf near the door.

"What ails him, doc?" asked Masters at last in a hoarse whisper.

The spell was broken. Poole coughed nervously and returned to the packing of his bag.

"So far as I can see," he hazarded, "it's one of those cases of a man getting knocked on the head and forgetting everything about himself—aphasia they call it."

"An' he'll be all right after this exceptin' he can't remember?"

"I think so. Sometimes they lose the power of reading or writing, and sometimes they can't talk sense any more. But this feller seems rational enough. You heard him talk. Whether anything ails him we can find out when he wakes up—probably to-morrow morning. Got a bed we can put him in, Randy?"

"Yes, next room back. It's Betty's,

but she'll have to take the sofy for the night."

They moved the sleeper, garbed him in a rough muslin nightshirt, pulled the sagging shutters to, and tiptoed out, closing the door behind them.

In the living-room Asa Poole took up his hat to go, but Masters detained him.

"You say he don't know who he is or he prob'ly wun't ever?" he asked.

"I'm afraid so."

"Well, then, p'r'aps there's somethin' in his clo'es might tell. Hadn't we ought to examine 'em?"

"H-m! I hadn't thought of that."

Poole set his hat and bag down again. It irked him to leave and face batteries of questions without the delight of imparting information.

The clothes of the stranger were few in number. First there was a rough woolen shirt, torn, stained, and burned. The maker's name had been obliterated. Then a pair of brown overalls with front apron and shoulder-straps, likewise stained and nearly worn-out.

Thomas, who held the garment aloft, remarked that there wasn't a fisherman on the island who would wear "oilers" like them. The overalls were of a standard brand and apparently bore no other clue than the maker's name.

But Thomas, who was running his great hand into the pockets, suddenly uttered an exclamation and drew forth a mass of soggy white paper that he slapped down on the center-table. The half-dozen men clustered round while the doctor investigated.

The paper, in reality, was more gray than white, and was of such coarse texture that splinters of wood-pulp could be picked out of its surface. It was in a half-roll and consisted of about thirty loose sheets.

Adjusting his glasses, the doctor tried to separate the mushy pages. He lifted the first one and saw written across it in broad, purple lines—the result of salt water and indelible pencil in conjunction—two words:

"Paul Baird————————"

That was all. With infinite patience they searched every inch of the wet mass but found no other hint of a mark.

"Paul Baird————————"

"Paul Baird!" said Asa Poole wonderingly. "Must be his name. Don't know what else it could be. But I don't understand those little marks after it. Never saw anybody write their name that way; did you, boys?"

A solemn shaking of unkempt heads and tangled beards answered his question.

They continued the examination.

Next came a pair of gray woolen socks so undistinguished as to have no name at all. The remaining footgear consisted of a pair of tramping-boots designated by the trade-mark "Iron," and the notice that they could be bought anywhere in the world. So far everything had been utterly worthless as a means of identification. The man had evidently not been wearing his coat at the time of the event that had rendered him unconscious, and, of course, it was in the coat that important clues such as letters, note-books, or cards would be found.

"He might be as much as a fireman on one of those coastwise steamers from St. John," suggested Poole, viewing the poor array of garments.

"No, couldn't be, doc," replied Masters. "If he was the name of the line an' the ship would be stenciled on the life-presarver he wore. There ain't no stencilin' on it at all except the maker's name—a Noo York firm. I looked partic'ler."

"And you didn't notice the piece of planking that kept him afloat, eh?"

"No, doc, I didn't—ner Jimmie neither, I guess," Thomas replied, with a negative shake of the head.

"Well, anyway," said Poole, "these clothes make him out a poor sort of cuss. Don't believe he amounted to much. What else is over there?"

One of the men handed over a fistful of soft, white stuff that proved to be underwear. The feel of it in his

hand made the provincial physician pause and gape wonderingly. He walked to the window to examine it closely, but drew back when he saw a knot of gossiping, curious women standing about the yard, some even trying to peer in the window.

At a discreet distance he handled and looked to his heart's content.

"H-m!" he remarked impressively to the others. "Pure silk and pure linen mixed. Five dollars a garment. I've priced it myself in St. John. Wonder how he happens to have it on? H-m! This changes the looks of everything. Don't know who he may be."

The luxurious garments such as had never before soothed the callous skins of the fishermen passed in wonder from hand to hand. They bore a German mark and under it the name of the agent for North America—a Montreal firm.

"Anything else?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, here's a belt of some kind," said one of the men, handing over the article.

It was different from the usual belt and resembled more a length of hose to pass about the body. There were a number of snap-flap pockets. Poole opened one of these and grunted his surprise.

Then he drew out a handful of dry green and yellow money that curled up immediately he threw it on the table. Other oil-silked pockets yielded similar hoards, and, when all had been disgorged, the fishermen looked upon more money than they had ever seen in tangible reality.

Poole set to work counting, and presently announced that there were two thousand one hundred and seventy-five dollars, all in Canadian bills.

"H-m! H-m!" cried the doctor, looking at his big silver watch. "It's too late to get this in the temporary bank this afternoon, but here's what you do, Jimmie. Stuff it all in your pocket and take it up to Squire Hardy's. He's got a little iron box that he locks up every night, and this'll be safe there. Now, boys, mind! Not a word to anybody, even your womenfolks, about this money. That's a power o' cash for any one man to be having about him."

Jimmie's dirty hands jammed the bills into his slimy, yellow oilskin pocket and he strode to the door. When he thrust it open he discovered Sally Masters slinking on tiptoe down the passage, and a group of shawled women talking in hoarse whispers at the foot of the stairs.

They besieged him with low-spoken questions, but he paid no attention and shouldered his way out, setting off westward along the road at a rapid pace, his features grim and non-committal.

Presently Asa Poole came out smiling, lifted his hat to his one-time patients, and drove away in his rickety buggy without volunteering a word of information.

Lastly, the remaining fishermen appeared in a body, but dispersed silently either to their homes or to delayed work at the fish-stand, each attended closely by his wife and stumbling, dirty children.

CHAPTER III.

BETTY SPRAGUE.

SALLY MASTERS, divining by half-heard sentences that important facts had come to light behind the closed door of the living-room, gave her husband no peace. Her curiosity, whetted to a razor-edge, found outlet in ceaseless, harsh-voiced questions. But Randy met her sallies with a baffling silence that was as exasperating as it was impregnable.

Betty Sprague received no such consideration at his hands.

"You mind your own business," he told her roughly when he found her listening outside the door of her little bedroom. "Get away from there!"

She obeyed defiantly. Later, when

the three of them were seated about the kitchen-table and Betty had brought the supper of fish-chowder and dark, boiled potatoes from the stove, she asked him a question regarding the stranger.

"Shut up about that!" he flared. "You've got all you can do without meddling in his affairs."

Six hours of Sally had tried him to the utmost, and now, like a loaded gun, he went off at the slightest pressure.

The girl looked at him with a glance of mingled contempt and rebellion.

"I'll find out, anyway," she told him with cool insolence. "You know I will."

Furious, he swung his great hand across the table and met her cheek with a resounding blow. She had seen it coming, but she did not dodge; still, strive as she would, the tears rose to her eyes and she bit her lip.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head," he roared, leaning forward, his dark face contorted. She recovered herself.

"Now I will find out sooner than I meant to at first," she said, a flame of ugly hatred in her eyes.

"You will, eh?" His voice was like the snarl of a beast. "Ye'll not! Ye'll obey me or ye'll go out in the street where ye came from! Sal an' me ain't fed an' kep' ye fer five years to hear that sort o' talk out of ye, ye charity hussy!"

"Quit yellin' that way, can't ye, Randy?" broke in Mrs. Masters. "All the neighbors'll hear ye."

"Well, let 'em," growled Randy, instinctively lowering his voice.

Betty had raised a spoonful of the fish concoction to her lips, but now she set it down untasted. The physical reaction from the blow had set in and she felt nauseated. She pushed back her chair and rose.

"I don't want no supper," she said dully. "I'm goin' in the other room a piece."

"See if ye can get in a better frame of mind while ye're there," admonished Sally. "An' don't fergit to come out an' do these dishes when we're through, either. No gallivantin' down the road to the post-office."

"All right."

The kitchen was the enlarged end of the hallway that ran through the house. Immediately to the right as Betty left the kitchen was the door of her bedroom. Farther along on the same side was the door of the living-room.

At the front the hall gave into the chilly parlor, still on the right. The creaking, uncarpeted staircase led up to a second story that contained the Masterses' bedroom and a dusty, vacant loft half filled with broken, miscellaneous objects.

Betty chose the living-room because it was nearest the bedroom—her usual vale of tears. The very bareness and poorness of the place seemed to make her anger ridiculous and futile. There was no lamp lighted as yet, but a low fire burned on the red-brick hearth. She herself had carried the heavy chunks of wood from the mountainous pile that rose higher than the house in the back yard.

She found her way unerringly to an old patent rocker that had, in years past, ridden out many a girlish storm with her. As she sat down there came a short, sharp blast from a boat-whistle near by, and Betty knew that the little steamer had arrived after her daily trip to Adams, Eastport, and St. Andrew's. In half an hour the mail would be distributed, and all Betty's friends would be talking and laughing outside the post-office; the one cherished hour of the twenty-four would come and go without her.

Her square, firm little chin quivered but kept the mastery. Staring hard at the fire, she rocked rapidly to and fro, that same chin resting in the hollow of one brown hand, which in turn was supported by an elbow planted on the prickly chair-arm.

Her face was tragic now, but even its expression could not obscure the real beauty that haunted it—the great,

dark eyes, the soft oval of the brown face, the warm throat, the red, alluring mouth, and the chin, piquant because of its very firmness.

Beauty was there, but beauty threatened with extinction, for the soul behind had nothing upon which to feed, nor had ever had, except what crumbs Betty had been able to pick up herself.

For example, she had discovered that the only way to extract any happiness whatever out of her life was to forget the unpleasant things that thronged it. So now she sought to forget—but not to forgive—the brutal blow and still more brutal abuse that Masters had dealt her.

The blow had almost effaced itself now that the sting and throb of it had gone, but his words seemed written in fire before her eyes. It was years since he had hurled the ignominy of her miserable adoption at her. She shrugged her shoulders.

"I suppose after ma's everlastin' peckin' at him he was consid'able riled an' took it out on me," she thought. "I almost wish I was back home again."

The back history of the Sprague family was something to inspire prayer.

Billy Sprague had been the one drunkard on the island, and for years had dragged his family through the social gutter. He was a weakly, vicious man, and the whole parish rejoiced at his death, which had occurred six years before.

His wife found herself destitute, for now there was no one to bring home even a few fish. Her first boy was the third child, and thirteen-year-old Betty was the eldest of all. Consequently the family was—to use a local ealism—"hove on the town."

The overseer of the poor did the best he could, but that was plainly not enough, and at last it was decided to farm out the two older girls. The mother was then supplied with washing from the scattered summer boarders, and some of the men turned up and planted a considerable truck-garden for her.

In response to an appeal for volunteers to take the girls, Randy Masters put in an application for one. Sally, the week before, had been clumsy enough to fall through a rotten cistern-cover and break her leg, and the cottage was one mass of dirt. So far as was known, the Masterses were decent people—they were regular at church and paid their bills; in the end Betty was sent to them.

It is impossible to tell the desperate emotions that this quiet child endured when suddenly placed in strange and unsympathetic surroundings. For three days she wept unceasingly and longed for her penniless home and acrid mother. Then her grief became blunted and, with the bewildered disappointment that her wretchedness had changed neither God nor the world, she settled stoically into the harness.

That was on her thirteenth birthday. Since then she had toiled like a galley slave.

She had visited her old home but once; then the dirty, squalid hut, the filthy children, the old, horrible memories, and the increased acid of her mother's tongue and temper had driven her back to the Masterses' roof gloomily thankful for relative luxury.

Betty's feud with Randy Masters dated from the time she had first begun to be a woman. With the mystery and glory of her new estate upon her she had suddenly, one day, given an exhibition of physical and mental independence that resulted in a pitched battle between them.

Masters had won physically, but the slowness of his wits had cost him dear, and since then they had been at swords' points, with Sally siding one way or the other as the feelings of the moment dictated.

"Charity hussy!" Betty muttered to herself, repeating his angry words and wincing. "Mebbe I am. Oh, I

wonder if this is all God meant me to have!"

Then she resolved to forget her unhappiness, and for relief turned her thoughts to the stranger who had so suddenly come into the household.

She had seen his face—pleasant, she thought, even in its unconsciousness—as the men bore him past her at the gate. She nad seen his long, helpless frame, and she wondered, with a faint blush, if he did not find trouble sleeping in her little white wooden bed.

She recalled the room as she had left it, and remembered, horror-stricken, certain intimate feminine things his eyes must certainly see in their first glance about the room. She started to her feet.

Could she rescue them?

She tiptoed across the dusty, threadbare carpet, quaking at every snap and groan of the boards under her feet. She found the door unlatched and pushed it open silently.

The room was close and fetid; not a breath of air entered it, for the men had closed the window after drawing the shutters.

Without hesitation she entered and threw both open, fastening the weightless window-sashes with the patent spring catches attached. As she raised the shade a yellow flood of light from a neighbor's lamp poured in the window and fell across the bed.

He lay there silent, calm, a look of blank peace upon his brow. She smiled as she noted that he had unconsciously curled up to keep all his length between the head and footboards. Quietly, like a nurse, she moved about the room, picking up a white thing here, a dark thing there, and hanging them decorously on the nail-studded board behind an old sheet that formed her clothes-closet.

Once he moved restlessly, and she crouched down until shielded by the footboard, praying that Randy or Sally might not come looking for her. But in a moment his breathing deepened.

Before she went she moved the little, straight chair that held his clothing between his eyes and the neighbor's lamp. Then she tiptoed out and left the door exactly as she had found it.

She was not a moment too soon, for, even as she resumed her rocker, she heard the heavy footsteps of Mrs. Masters approaching along the passage.

"Betty!"

"Yes, I'm coming."

Hardly conscious of the fact, she rose and walked toward the hall. At the other end of it waited an hour's labor that she despised—the supper dishes and the kitchen to be tidied.

Suddenly she realized that to-night she no longer loathed it; she wanted work, endless work with her hands, that her soul might be free to take its fairy flights undisturbed.

Her mind was in her poor, ugly room with its little white bed and the helpless man asleep. Without knowing why, she wished to mother him, to take infinite pains to make him comfortable, to fuss about and shake his pillows, and carry him good things to eat on a tray.

She felt a very definite sense of proprietorship, for was it not she who had opened his window and saved him from semisuffocation in that tiny cubby? She tried to stifle at birth the jealousy that she knew would rack her when Sally commenced to order things round for the patient.

Motherliness, proprietorship, and jealousy she had acquired from ten minutes in the stranger's room! Yes, and something else, something that had no name, something unspeakably secret and deliciously intimate—the knowledge that she had, alone, seen him sleeping there, bare-chested, masculine, lusty. It was as though the veils of the world's mystery had been miraculously thinned for a moment.

Sally Masters entered the living-room, scratched a match on the plaster, and lighted the lamp. Betty stood by the door dazedly, lost in her half-bashful thoughts.

"What's the matter?" demanded Mrs. Masters in a tone that might be called relenting, in that it contained a faint trace of concern. "Randy lam ye too hard?"

"No, I'm goin' right out."

Betty spoke heavily, for the reality was cruel after the dream.

"The boat's in—did ye know it?"

"Yes, I heard the whistle."

"Friend of yours come home."

"Friend of mine?"

Betty looked up, scorning her stepmother's evident mildness. She knew the mood was employed only when some end was to be gained or when Sally feared Betty would complain of her ill-treatment to outsiders.

"Yes, Esther Lane."

Betty looked at her, unbelieving.

"Back from the Adams sardine factory in the middle of July?" she asked, astonished.

"Yes. She done worse'n you when you come home the first of August last year. You young snappers are pretty high and mighty, I c'n tell you. There's lots o' good money to be earned over there."

Betty turned away again. The conversation had suddenly stepped on thin ice.

The summer before Betty, nagged to earn for herself, had gone with half a dozen other young girls from North Head to pack American sardines in the Adams canning factory. Her abrupt return early in August had never been explained, and baffled curiosity had rankled in Sal Masters's bosom ever since.

"Wal, that ain't what I came to say," went on the elder woman pacifically. "Esther's been askin' fer ye on the telephone, and I cal'late she's out front now. You go 'long with her, and I'll look after them dishes. But look here, Betty, don't you want something to eat? Ye ain't had a mouthful."

"No, I don't want anything," the girl called over her shoulder, already half-way down the hall.

Snatching a cheap, gray sweater from a nail behind the front door she hurried out, letting the screen bang to behind her. A girl was waiting in front of the porch.

Betty clasped her in an impulsive embrace.

"Hello, Betty," said the other in a dull voice, responding half-heartedly.

"I'm awfully glad you're back. It's been lonesome without you." Betty was ecstatic.

"I wish I'd never gone at all, like you told me not to."

Betty drew back and regarded the other uncertainly, vaguely disturbed. This girl was totally unlike the grave, but happy Esther Lane of two months ago.

"What's the matter?" she asked, uneasy.

"Plenty. Come along, let's walk."

They passed out between the unsteady gate-posts and turned westward along the King's Road. The sky was dimly luminous with the invisible risen moon, but across it drove masses of wind-tattered rain-clouds. A chill blast that forecast a northeast gale moaned through the trees and hurried them along.

On the left of the road a declivity led down to the stony beach at the point where it curved southward, and out on the bay the riding lights of the sloops and schooners rose and fell slowly with the increasing sea. The smell of salt was strong and penetrating.

It was a wild, melancholy night, and Betty, hugging her sweater close about her, felt a depressing sense of foreboding.

Without speech the girls walked the quarter of a mile to the point where the mountain ridge forced the road to turn sharply south. An uncertain path —made by the men when hauling out their winter wood — climbed the hill, and this they followed to a secluded spot among the pines that was a favorite retreat.

"Now tell me what's the matter," said Betty as they seated themselves on a windfallen log.

Esther did not speak at once, but when she did it was to question.

"Ain't it awful over in them canning towns, Bet?" she asked with a little shiver.

"Awful!" The one word, spoken as Betty spoke it, told a volume. "Did you board to Jason's?"

"Yes." Esther coughed a moment. "There wasn't no other place when I got there. Fer a while I couldn't sleep what with the noise and the smell o' things."

"Fish do ye mean?"

"Not so much them as the cheap oil an' the dump-piles an' the town itself. Why, Bet, that town is so dirty an' low an' unhealthy that three of the girls an' two of the men I know are down with typhoid now. Oh, I think it's awful."

"What're they payin' this year?"

"Six cents fer packin' a dozen cans. Some days I made as much as eighty-five cents, an' once I made a dollar."

"Was Bertha Nolan there this year?" asked Betty. "She made as much as one dollar and a half in a day once last year. Season's record, it was."

"Yes, she was there." Esther's voice lost its heaviness for a moment. "Great to watch her, ain't it? My, but she makes 'em fly." Her enthusiasm died again. "Who was the boss you worked for, Bet?"

"Manello. He's one reason why I came home. Made us stand on our feet from seven o'clock one morning till two o'clock the next, and said if we didn't come back again at seven he would fire us. I nearly fainted, but I got there. Fifteen girls lost their jobs."

"He was there again an' worse than ever. Workin' that way with nothin' fit to eat is what makes so many of the girls sick. Adams is a reg'lar hospital this summer, an' yet there ain't a decent place to take anybody. We were all crowded in together so! Ugh!" She shuddered as though with an ague. "I been sick myself, Betty."

"What! You been sick, Esther?"

There was a sudden stunned silence. Then, suddenly, Esther threw her arms about her friend and clung close as though some one sought to force her away.

"Oh, Betty!" she cried bitterly. "I'm so afraid!"

"There! There!" Betty patted her shoulder as though she were comforting a child. "You needn't be afraid any more. You're safe at home now."

"That's the worst of it," wailed the other in despair. "I can't stay home."

"What do you mean, Esther?"

All at once Betty found herself in the grip of a chill dread, as though something unnamably tragic had happened. The feeling was inexplicable, unexpected, hateful. She tried to shake it off but could not. She dreaded the other's answer. There was a moment's silence, then as before, Esther replied with a question.

"Did you know a young feller named Charlie Carter when you was to the factory last summer?"

A feeling of suffocation robbed Betty of speech for a moment.

"Yes," she said finally.

"Good-lookin' feller, good clothes, an' had a way with the girls?"

"Yes."

Esther breathed a great sigh that finished with a convulsive sob, but in a moment stoically controlled herself.

"Know him much?" she asked.

In the darkness Betty felt her cheeks flame and her heart ache. Behind that flame and that ache lay the story of her first romance and the most completely shattered of all her idols.

"Yes, till he got beyond me. Then I come home!"

"Why Bet, what do you mean, 'got beyond you'?"

"It come to a question of whether I'd give in to him—I thought the world o' him, Esther—or whether I'd have to use my splittin' knife on him some night. I always carried it at the last. I saw where things were goin', an' I got out before it was too late."

The All-Story to be a Weekly

Beginning with the next issue of The All-Story (on sale March 5th) it will be changed from a monthly to a weekly magazine, and the price will be reduced from 15 cents to 10 cents a copy.

The price for yearly subscriptions will be advanced from $1.50 to $4.00, but this means 52 numbers of the new magazine against 12 of the old. Thus on yearly subscriptions THE ALL-STORY WEEKLY will cost a little over $7\frac{1}{2}$ cents a copy against $12\frac{1}{2}$ cents a copy in the old monthly form, and the size of the weekly will be practically the same as before.

This change is made primarily with the view to furnishing you All-Story readers with a better vehicle for the serialization of novels. The All-Story is nine years old. It started, as its name implies, as an all-fiction publication, and the preponderance of its fiction was and always has been serial stories.

But the public, as I sense the public taste, has now grown too impatient to wait an entire month for the continuation of a story,

and to wait many months, often, for its completion.

The weekly publication is the ideal vehicle for the serialization of a novel. A monthly appears too infrequently and a daily appears too frequently. Hence the weekly, which is ideal.

Some monthly magazines, anxious to overcome the defects of the long waits between instalments, have become semi-monthlies, but the semi-monthly, like the semi-anything, hasn't quite the seeming of the real thing. It isn't a natural break. The day, the week, the month, the year—these are all natural breaks of time. And it so happens that for the purpose of serializing a novel the weekly break just about fits in with the temperament and convenience and taste of human nature.

So we are changing The All-Story Monthly to THE ALL-STORY WEEKLY. In form, in make-up, and in the quality and character of its stories it will be the same in the future as it has been in the past. The writers who have endeared themselves to your hearts will remain with us.

This weekly idea is not an experiment. We tried it out two years ago, beginning January 1, 1912, with The Cavalier. It has been a splendid success and has grown into great

favor with the reading public generally. The Cavalier Weekly is the theater in the home, and it gives a performance once a week, fifty-two times a year, instead of twelve times in its old monthly form.

Now, what we did for The Cavalier readers in changing from a monthly to a weekly we are doing for you. But you get the advantage of a reduced price which they did not get. The Cavalier Monthly was a ten-cent magazine, so in the change from monthly to weekly there was no reduction in price. Though there was no price advantage, a very big increase in circulation came immediately with the change to the weekly form, and The Cavalier has gone on increasing in circulation ever since.

Now what does this mean? It means that we are giving the readers of The Cavalier what they want, and giving it to them at the right price. If we were not giving them what they want in the weekly form, it is an obvious certainty that the circulation would decrease rather than increase.

It is likewise an obvious certainty that ten cents is a good deal more popular price than fifteen cents. Fifteen cents never did appeal to us any more than the semi-anything-at-all has appealed to us, but with only twelve issues a year, and with the greater cost of producing and editing magazines in these days, and with other matters bearing on the proposition, the fifteen-cent price became necessary for a monthly magazine.

But with fifty-two issues a year instead of twelve, the cost of rent, editorial service, printing plant, and

other costs are spread over so many more issues that we are able to produce and sell a weekly magazine at ten cents for which we should be compelled to charge fifteen cents as a monthly.

This is all to the advantage of the reader, and brings us back to our old ten-cent price, which we initiated and established in this country, and which we are very glad to restore with whatever publications can be handled with a profit at that price.

I hope and believe that this change will meet with your hearty and enthusiastic approval, and I want to assure you that in THE ALL-STORY WEEKLY we shall give you a better vehicle for the serialization of stories than you have ever read.

THE ALL-STORY WEEKLY will have its same editorial staff, a staff that is in sympathy with you, a staff that knows what you want and a staff with which you have demonstrated that you are in sympathy because of the splendid support you have given to The All-Story Magazine during its nine years as a monthly.

With this change in The All-Story, we no longer have any monthly periodicals that carry serial stories. Munsey's Magazine, The Argosy, and the Railroad Man's Magazine, all monthlies, abandoned the serial some months ago. These three magazines now publish complete books in the place of serial stories. That is, each magazine publishes a complete full-length book story in each issue—a brand new novel.

But there are many readers who like their stories in serial form if the instalments come along often enough—come along weekly instead of monthly, and this is why we are changing this magazine into a weekly.

Frank A. Munsey

There came a complete silence between them. Outside their protected nook the wind pounced upon the forest, laughing and shrieking down the tangled aisles. The roar of the surf mounted steadily as the gale increased.

Occasionally would come a flash of silver light from overhead as the moon leaked out suddenly between the clouds; then the luminous darkness would be flung again across the sea, the restless bay, and the village.

At length there came a lull as though an armistice had been declared between all the warring elements. In that lull Esther spoke.

"I didn't get out before it was too late!" she said in a dry, hard voice. "An' oh—what will I do? My mother doesn't even know."

Betty swiftly drew her close in a spasmodic embrace, although her brain whirled and she experienced the sensation of sinking very fast.

"You — he —" she gasped and stopped.

"Yes."

It was the old leaden tone again. Esther released herself from Betty's clasp.

"You mustn't touch me, I'm bad."

Betty sat as one stunned.

"You must have loved him very much," she said at last, scarcely aloud.

"That's the worst of it!" cried Esther in a voice of somber despair. "I only thought I did. If I had, everything would be different, but when I think back now I know I didn't."

"But why then—"

"Oh, I wanted something, it seems to me now, that'd bring a little summer into that horrible factory, Betty—it has been summer, hasn't it, over here on the island? In that awful place, with those awful men an' girls an' that boardin'-house, an' the fog an' dirt an' smells, I wanted anything that was a little bright an' different. He seemed to give it to me. He seemed—I wonder if you thought so too, Betty—like a reg'lar lover out of a book."

"Yes, I know."

"An' I thought that maybe I was meant to be happy that way, even if some people did say it was wrong. But there ain't no happiness in it, Betty—none."

Again came the silence between them, and the renewed riot of the storm. A dash of rain rattled like shot against the trees.

"Ain't he goin' to marry you?"

"No!" Esther's voice was hard and firm. "I wouldn't marry him fer the price of the hull Adams works. Think I'd make us two miserable fer life just because I was a fool once? Leavin' him out of it, I think too much of myself.

"Come on, Bet, let's go home. It's beginnin' to rain hard, an' I've got to tell my mother somehow. Come on."

Without another word they left their shelter, descended the mountain path, and, bowing against the storm, trudged homeward along the muddy and deserted road.

CHAPTER IV.

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER.

THE stranger awoke when a ray of sunlight, creeping between the spindles on the back of the chair Betty had placed by the window, played dazzlingly across his eyelids. Instinctively he turned his head, but the very motion brought him closer to consciousness, and presently he opened his eyes upon the walls of Betty's bedroom.

He lay for a few moments staring blankly and attempting to explain his presence there. Without effort, memory returned; he recalled seeing the face of the doctor and the bushy beards and rough dress of the fishermen; he remembered that the doctor had talked to him, questioned him, and given him something tingling to drink. After that he had not remembered much—

Oh, yes! There was the time the

doctor had forced him to think horribly hard, and he had strained against an immovable wall built squarely across the middle of his head. He could still feel the hopelessness he had felt then.

He lifted his hand to his right cheek. The bandage was still there and had become stuck to his face during the night. It was inconvenient and painful, and made him restless.

One by one facts of his brief conscious period returned to him, until at last he remembered everything. He was a man without a name, a home, a family, or a friend. He was a man, in short, without a past! So far as mind was concerned, he had only been born yesterday.

"Perhaps," he thought, "a night's sleep has changed things. I feel strong and well enough in every other way. Let's see, now."

Determined efforts at remembrance proved that the stone wall had not gone; still, he had a very definite hope that perhaps it had weakened in the night, and so, suddenly, with all his might, he stormed it in a desperate attempt to remember his name.

Instantly what he had thought a wall became a mountain, black, forbidding, impossible. He could feel the actual weight of it across the top of his head, and he relaxed the effort with a grimace of pain.

Then his mind turned weakly to consider his present situation.

Who were these people that had taken him in? Whose room was this? Whom had he driven out of bed?

He speculated vaguely. Then the bed itself interested him. He was surprised to notice how little it was and grinned when he found he could rest his ankles on the top of the footboard if he stretched his full length.

"Who could have slept here?" he asked himself, with emotions similar to those of the big bear in the fairy tale.

His ear was presently caught by a ticking on the chair. Then he discovered his gun-metal watch and saw that it was half past five. Hunger, long denied, was consuming him; he was restless from hours on his back, and was curious to investigate his surroundings.

He swung his feet out of bed and commenced to put on his clothes, quietly and rapidly. During the process he found his money-belt. It was empty, and caused him some wonderment.

He could not recall the proper use for it, especially since he had no need for it in dressing. He puzzled over the matter for many minutes, but finally gave it up, with a shake of the head, and left the belt across the seat of the chair.

Knowing the hour was early and fearful of disturbing the household, he was quiet and gained his door in one long, tiptoe stride. It was unlatched and opened silently. With extravagant precaution he measured another stride into the living-room.

Then he stopped abruptly, shocked into immobility.

Almost under his right hand, half in the little bay window, was a red plush couch, and on it a sleeping girl. Her dark hair was tumbled across the hard pillow, and her face had the swollen look of one who has been weeping.

A ragged afghan covered her, but it could not obliterate the firm, long curves of her body. One arm was above her head, her pink fingers half curled, and her whole attitude expressed complete abandon. She slept peacefully, except for an occasional sobbing catch in her breath.

The stranger stood for a moment rooted to the floor in terror that she might waken. Then a kinder emotion crept, warm and throbbing, through his veins. From some source in his unlighted past poured a flood of pure delight at the picture of this radiant girl. While the man in him caught breath at the beauty of her, the esthete noted the perfect modeling of the round arm and the flowing undulations of the body.

His mingled emotions held him fascinated, but at last he shook himself free. Then he smiled, both with tenderness and amusement.

"Dear little soul!" he thought. "And you gave up your bed for me!"

With one step he was back in his room and had closed the door. A minute later he had climbed out of the window and stood upon the ground. Still cautious, he crept quietly round the house, intending to explore the road, but half-way to the front gate he was startled to see a man busy with a scythe in the tangled yard. This man welcomed the opportunity for rest and leaned upon his crooked instrument.

"Mornin'," said Randy Masters.

"Morning. Fine day, isn't it?"

The storm of the night before had canted round to the southwest, and a warm, gentle wind from the Gulf Stream, a hundred and fifty miles out to sea, brought haunting recollections of the tropics.

"Yas; little surf on, but I cal'late we can fish."

"Is that what you all do here—fish?"

"Yep. Them as can't pack, salts; and them as can't salt, fishes. Altogether, there ain't been nothin' else done on Grand Manan for over a hundred years. Some fellers keeps store and some picks dulce in summer—"

"Pick what?"

"Dulce. Braown kind o' seaweed; grows on the rocks 'long the back o' the island. They say folks sell it dried fer a nickel a bag along near T Wharf to Boston. Mebbe ye been's far west as Boston?"

Randy's affable discourse was interrupted by the shouting of a harsh voice in the house; in a moment a frightened, sleepy one joined it; they both mounted; the harsh voice triumphed and finally faded away as its owner shuffled back into the kitchen. The stranger swung round, scowling; but, hearing no more, returned to the conversation.

"Boston?" he said vaguely; "I don't know. Where is Boston?"

"That's right. You don't remember nothin', do you?" remarked Masters, as though cataloguing him. Nothin' come to ye overnight, did it—your name, le's say?"

"No. Nothing."

Masters looked at the other keenly and saw that he was speaking the truth. An idea occurred to him.

"Might it be your name was Paul Baird?" he asked. "We found that written on a piece of paper in yer overalls."

The stranger exhibited no emotion. He ruminated on the suggestion.

"Perhaps it was," he said at last. "It's quite possible, if it was written on anything of mine. Paul Baird! H-m!"

In the ensuing silence Masters swished busily through the grass.

"We got to call ye something, ye know," he threw over his shoulder.

"Yes, of course. To tell you the truth that name doesn't mean any more to me than if I had written Thomas Fogarty; but if I wrote it I fancy it must be my name. Better call me that, anyhow. It's awful to feel you haven't even a name, Mr.—"

"I'm Randy Masters, an' my wife's Sally," volunteered the fisherman. "That's her you heard a minute ago."

"Oh, yes; but didn't I hear some one talking to her in there?" Baird acted the part of idle curiosity to perfection. "Who was that?"

"Oh, I guess you mean young Betty Sprague, a girl we tuk in five year ago, because her mother was hove on the town. Impudent little hussy she be; but she takes some o' the work off'n Sal. Guess we better go in to breakfast now. I got to get out on the Banks by seven."

He leaned his rusty and mended scythe against an apple-tree and led the way round the house to the kitchen door.

The early morning was wonderfully peaceful in the village. Lines of blue

smoke from the brick chimneys rose almost straight into the golden sunlight.

Beyond and below, the bay was blue and glittering, and already men were out in the dories picking the herring-bait nets set the night before. Occasionally there came the rattle of an exhaust as one of the boats came in.

At the freight pier the steamer was belching black smoke and had already whistled a half-hour warning of her departure. Far down the crescent of the beach on the right Castalia gleamed white, with an occasional fiery glare as the sun smote a window-pane. At the left the string of islands seemed dark and foreboding as they presented their shady sides, but the grim backbone of Manan showed splotched with melting shades of green. There was a momentary summer sweetness in the air.

Masters and Baird found Betty flushed and busy over the stove, while Sally set the red-clothed table with cracked glassware and steel utensils.

"Wall, ain't grub ready yet?" demanded Masters, viewing the scene.

"Don't lay into me, Randy Masters," snapped his wife. "Go for Betty, here. She never got up till I drug her out o' bed fifteen minutes ago."

But Masters, recollecting Baird, withheld his ire.

"I f'und the stranger up early an' I cal'late he's hungry," he grumbled. "Mr. Baird, this is my wife an' that's Betty I was tellin' ye about."

Mrs. Masters clutched the "silver" and commenced a running fire of conversation to cover her embarrassment. Betty lifted her eyes to the steady gray ones that pierced her with kindly scrutiny, blushed, and said nothing.

"Might's well come down to the stand an' see the boats go out," suggested Randy when breakfast was over. "You c'n watch the steamer sail, too; that's quite a sight. You got to wait fer the doctor, anyway, an' he won't be up fer an hour."

The brief walk to the fish-stand seemed long to Baird. Already neighbors had commenced to call at the Masters cottage on one pretext or another to get a more satisfying look at the stranger, and now, as by some preconcerted signal, slatternly women appeared on their sagging door-steps to watch him pass.

Some leaned over their gates and tried to engage Randy in conversation, but he plodded stolidly on without replying. The dull-eyed women, robbed of their moment of excitement, drifted resignedly back to their drudgery or talked in shrill voices to a neighbor across a fence.

At the fish-stand there was more activity. Men hurried to their dories with bait-pails full of silvery herring; others swung trawl-tubs down into sloops alongside the wharf. The doors to the salting-bins were open and a strong odor of fish and brine rose on the air. The worn planking underfoot, now dry, was crusted with scales and fragments, over which hung clouds of huge flies.

When Masters appeared with Baird there was a sudden halt as the men looked over the newcomer.

Jimmie Thomas, feeling that his part in the rescue entitled him to a word, walked over and spoke. A few others joined him.

"He says he thinks we better call him Baird—Paul Baird," volunteered Randy presently. "Says it must be his name if he wrote it on the paper we f'und in his jeans."

"Just what I cal'lated all the time," said Thomas.

That day on the Banks the word was passed round, and henceforth the stranger became Paul Baird to the whole of Grand Manan.

When all was ready the men dropped into their boats, cranked the engines, and the entire dirty and multicolored fleet swept round Flag Point, out the mouth of the harbor, and to sea.

The steamer at the adjoining pier barked a single whistle and Baird idled

in its direction. He received scant attention here, for belated passengers were hurrying aboard, and freight was being slid down the long incline to the lower deck.

At the moment of sailing, when the gangplank was about to be drawn in, there came a sound of running feet and a panting cry to wait.

Baird turned and saw a little man with a gray Vandyke beard sprinting down the pier, a ramshackle wagon containing three trunks close in pursuit. The activities at the gangplank ceased and the little man dropped into an exhausted walk.

Baird stood less than twenty feet from the end of the pier and the newcomer necessarily passed very close to him.

As he did so he lifted his eyes and looked at Baird. Suddenly the annoyed expression of his congested face changed to one of overwhelming surprise.

He hesitated, almost stopped, and seemed about to speak. Then he snorted, gave a final glance, and went on.

"Oh, no; it's impossible!" he muttered. "It's preposterous! The thing couldn't possibly be! But the resemblance is remarkable. Most remarkable!"

The whistle barked again and the passenger skipped aboard. Instantly the ropes were cast off forward and aft, and the steamer moved slowly away.

But the little gray-bearded man had taken a position on deck opposite to Baird and continued to alternately stare at him and shake his head until the vessel had rounded Flag Point.

"Who is that man?" Paul asked of a tobacco-chewing bystander.

"That's Perfessor Tertius Boring. Keeps a cottage daown to the point, an' teaches paintin'—pitchers an' suchlike. Hez a class here in the summer, but his people are gone now. Comes from Noo York way 'baout June every year."

"Where is he going now?"

"Bill Boughton's driver tol' me yestiddy he was baound fer Yurrip fer a year. Paintin' too, I guess. Sails from Quebec in a week, he said. Why? Ever know him?"

"Not that I can remember," answered Paul vaguely, as he walked away sorely puzzled.

CHAPTER V.

DOOMED.

RETURNING to the Masters cottage, Baird found that he still had three-quarters of an hour to wait for the doctor. He sat down on the low stoop and relaxed against one of the two-by-four pillars that diagonally supported the roof.

He had barely made himself comfortable when Betty appeared at the gate with her arms full of bundles and opened it with an unceremonious kick. She walked to the porch, let the articles fall, and sat down frankly close to Baird.

"Is it true," she asked, searching his face with her brown eyes, "that you don't remember anything at all before yistiddy?"

Baird was disappointed.

She seemed unkempt, ill-conditioned, hopeless. The greasy waist, fringed skirt-hem, and run-over shoes jangled harshly against the something like an ideal he had already formed of her. Still, her individuality was not quite submerged.

Despite the impudence of the question there was a certain quality or flavor in her manner of asking it that disarmed resentment. She was undeniably Betty Sprague in everything.

"Yes, it is true," he replied gravely. "Why do you ask?"

She commenced to gather the parcels together.

"Last night pa told me not to, and I swore I would, anyway. I asked 'em at Boughton's store — that's where I just come from—but they didn't seem sure, so I thought I'd find you and git

it first hand." She rose. "Excuse me, please; I got to go in an' start the ironin'. Ma'd kill me if she saw me settin' out here gassin' with you."

Baird heaved himself off the low stoop.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I want to thank you for letting me sleep in your bed last night. That sofa must have been hard and uncomfortable."

"How'd you know where I slep'?" she flashed with disconcerting directness.

Baird gulped, nonplused, and cudgeled his brains for a tactful reply.

"Why — that is — er!" he stammered.

A sudden little gale of laughter completed his discomfiture. Betty stood in the half-open doorway regarding him over her shoulder with a look strangely alluring and mischievous.

"Never mind," she said. "Don't think so hard. If it hadn't been for me you'd have smothered to death in that room."

The door banged and she was gone.

"Bless me! She turned the tables neatly that time!" said Baird, chuckling, when he had fathomed her reply.

Then he sobered and his face darkened.

"Poor little thing!" he thought. "She doesn't look as though she laughed often. Five years with these awful people! God, what a life!"

When Dr. Poole climbed stiffly out of his buggy he found his patient waiting.

"Well," he said, smiling and rubbing his hands, "seem to be all right this morning, eh?"

"Never felt better — physically. Bandage bothers my face a little, that's all."

"You weren't badly burned at the worst. Come inside and I'll fix it up. May be able to leave the thing off entirely to-morrow."

When the change had been made Poole snapped his bag shut and sat determinedly down on one of the stiff chairs facing his patient.

"And now," he asked with professional cheer, "how's the mind?"

"That's what I want to talk to you about, doctor," said Paul anxiously. "I've tried to remember things again this morning, but it's no use."

He touched the top of his head experimentally as though trying to locate something.

"It seems as though there was a stone wall built squarely across here." His fingers came to rest on the center of the crown. "I can't budge it!"

"H-m! H-m! Can't budge it, eh?"

"No. Now, doctor, I want you to say frankly just what is the matter with me, and what chance there is for a cure."

"Well," began Poole gravely, "we call it total aphasia, complete forgetfulness."

He entered into a long dissertation on the subject, citing medical instances and authorities.

When he had finished he made his patient write the words "Paul Baird," and these he presently compared with the signature found the day before on the water-soaked paper. The two chirographies were entirely dissimilar. Then followed numerous reading and other tests until at last Poole sat back with a gesture of finality.

"I'll tell you flatly, Mr. Baird," he said, "that yours is a case of *absolute* transition. So far as I know, and I have spent most of the night reading on the subject, there is no cure whatever for you. Some people have been restored to their former personalities by receiving a blow similar to the one that caused their aphasia—but I don't advise you to try that method. It would almost certainly kill you.

"Now what I advise is that you remain right here for a time until you have rested completely. Don't worry and don't try to dig up the past. If you do, brain-fever may result, and Heaven knows what after that!"

"Idiocy or lunacy?" suggested Baird in a tone of bitterness.

"I am glad you are aware of your

own danger," said Poole dryly. "Now you know why you must abandon all thought of your former life. Forget it entirely, and live only for each present hour as it arrives."

"But how can I stay here indefinitely a burden to these people?" cried Paul in despair. "Look at me! What can I do? I haven't a cent! I—"

The doctor leaned forward and put his hand on the other's knee, at the same time searching the troubled gray eyes.

"You don't remember any money?" he asked keenly.

"No."

"Did you find a strange-looking belt with your clothes this morning?"

"Yes. And I couldn't for the life of me understand what it was."

"That was your money-belt, and it contained two thousand one hundred and seventy-five dollars in Canadian bills when we undressed you yesterday. You needn't be afraid of becoming a burden or pauper here. Among fishermen that amount is a fortune."

"Where is the money now?"

"Squire Hardy has it in his safe. He's coming to the village in a little while, and, if you would like, we'll take you to the temporary bank and help you deposit."

Poole rose and picked up his hat and bag.

"Well, my boy, I'll be back in half an hour," he concluded. "Meanwhile do something to keep yourself busy."

Paul went with him to his buggy and lifted in the stone that anchored the old white horse. Returning, he saw Randy Masters's scythe leaning against the apple-tree.

"Might as well begin with this as anything," he thought, and took down the ungainly instrument.

He found the whetstone in the first crotch of the tree and attempted to put an edge on the rusty blade. The rasping brought neighbors to their windows and porches, and they eyed his actions with dull curiosity.

But Baird did not notice them. For the first time he faced himself and his future squarely. The past, with all its possibilities, was dead. Who or what he had been before were nothing. He felt as one behind whom some ponderous steel door has silently closed, cutting him off absolutely from life and the living. Henceforth he knew he must regulate his days by the events and persons encountered in this new existence.

It was a gloomy outlook.

Mentally he tried to accommodate himself to this desolate, sea-girt island, this squalid, neutral village, and these people so hopeless in their sodden daily round.

The effort soon became repugnant, for some intuition from depths of his lost personality realized the full dejection of this somber environment and reflected it vaguely upon the dulled mirror of his mind. The sun shone, but brought no gladness; of spontaneous work there was none—only dreary labor; there was life, but no joy of life.

His mental affliction had not yet borne him down, for the tragedy of it had not struck home. His inability to remember was still sufficiently novel to be interesting rather than horrible. In regard to his mind Baird felt sensations somewhat like those of a man who, wakening, gradually becomes aware that his arm is asleep.

First there was the shock of feeling that it had somehow become a separate and detached thing, then the surprised helpless alarm when he discovered that it did not respond to his demands. Lastly, there suddenly rushed upon him such a wild panic as children feel when faced suddenly with a new and terrifying experience. It gripped him with such fear of his mysterious malady that suddenly the grim realities he had loathed before seemed to become sweet and pleasant things.

He clung to the thought of them eagerly.

Long since he had ceased his mechanical scything, clasped his fists about the hump of the handle, and

bowed his head upon them. Now the full horror of his empty life was revealed to him and he groaned aloud.

"Gone! Gone forever!" he muttered in the anguish of sudden realization. "Never to know anything! I shall be buried alive here!"

His voice was a cry of despair. He lifted his head like a terrified animal.

"Buried alive!" the voice went on. "No one will find me! Who am I? Oh, who am I?"

His tall figure swayed weakly.

He did not see nor hear her approach. He only knew that a cool, little hand was slipped between his, and that she spoke. Her voice was flute-like with pity and her words were the words of youth aged in sorrow.

"There, there," she crooned; "ye mustn't take on so. Ye must try not to think about it, Mr. Baird; I hear the doctor tell ye."

She took the scythe gently from between his hands and let it fall to the ground.

"What good will scythin' do ye if ye think about your troubles? Ye're supposed to think about scythin' when ye scythe. There, there, now—come over an' set daown. It'll go off in a minute."

The fire of panic died out of his eyes and they became placid again. But he leaned on her slim young shoulder heavily, for he suddenly felt very weak and tired. Instinctively his nature, shocked and bruised, sought comfort in hers that seemed so strong and ready and dependable. He leaned upon her in spirit as well as in body.

They sat down together on the low stoop. Presently, when he recalled the spying neighbors, he released her. Gradually his strength came back to him and he smiled bravely.

"Of course!" he said. "What a fool I am! When I scythe I must think about scything, and when I eat I must think about eating."

"That's it," she rejoined eagerly. "Then you won't have any time to think about yerself, an' ye can't go to pieces like ye just did. Lucky I was comin' round the house for the old clothes-line under the porch! Now pull yerself together, Mr. Baird, for I c'n see Squire Hardy trackin' this way daown the road."

Betty busily smoothed his mussed hair, ran and fetched the cap he had unheedingly pushed off, and helped him to his feet.

"I won't forget how you've stood by me to-day," said Paul, looking down into the little upturned face.

"Oh, now, now! Run along and meet the squire!" she cried, laughing uncertainly, and pushing him toward the front gate, as a mother would a child. He obeyed meekly.

"Betty!"

It was Sal's raucous voice.

As though some one had obscured the sun, the light died out of Betty's face. The features relaxed and sank again into their accustomed heavy lines; her shoulders drooped forward as those of one who prepares to receive a burden. She picked up the rope she had dropped and turned in the direction of her labor.

"Comin', ma," she rasped, and scuffed back round the house. The veil so lightly lifted had fallen again. Once more she was Randy Masters's "adopted."

The squire reached the gate where Paul stood just as Dr. Poole, on foot this time, arrived from the opposite direction. Following the introductions, the doctor lifted an interrogatory eyebrow at the squire. The latter, a stout, pudgy man with an exceedingly red face surrounded by an aureole of snowy whiskers, slapped his money-pockets heartily.

"Here, every cent of it!" he declared.

At once the three took their way along the road toward the wharfs and the business portion of the village.

"I've found the very thing for you, Mr. Baird," said the doctor, after a bit. "Bill Boughton just told me that his son, Chet, sailed on the steamer

this mornin' for Boston. Thinks store-keeping here is too slow, and wants to go gankin' on one of those 'toothpick' trawlers.

"Of course that leaves Bill short-handed in the store. He wants a clerk, so I spoke to him about you. He said he'd like to see you and talk it over. Now, before you go in there I'll say this for Bill; he's a fine man to work for, pays good, and let's a man alone. I'd advise you to take it."

"I'd like the job," said Paul decisively.

The experience with the scythe had proven the correctness of Poole's diagnosis regarding the freaks of his mind. It had been warning enough.

"How much will Boughton pay?" he added.

"Four dollars a week."

"I'll take it!" said Paul instantly.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO MONTHS LATER.

NORTH HEAD lay spiritless under the lash of a malevolent northeaster. From Swallowtail Point the lead-colored ocean appeared to heave and bubble like a vast caldron flecked with white.

A hundred feet below, at the foot of the crag, sounded the regular crash of the great rollers, charging the impregnable island. A mist of spray and scud tossed up from the maelstrom, drove inland and thinly veiled the bowed trees, casting a gloom inexpressibly sad over all.

The surf leaped against the tip of Long Island so that the grim, low rock had the appearance of a battle-ship racing at top speed through a choppy sea. Even in the bay there was a heavy motion, and the assembled fishing-boats pointed and bowled and bucked and squelched at one another like a convention of polite but hateful chorus-ladies.

At irregular intervals pelting rain-squalls drove slanting through the village, discoloring the faded houses, churning the dirt-roads into mud, and destroying the few sturdy flowers remaining in the broken dories.

North Head seemed almost deserted. Only an occasional shawled figure, struggling against the wind, saved it from the appearance of a village of the dead.

The men loved such days as this. Ensconced before the log-fires in their living-rooms, pipe in mouth, slippered feet on a chair opposite, and a week-old St. John paper in hand, they let the wind blow and the sea rage and the women work; they did, that is, if the worm had not turned. In the latter case they found an equally good pipe and sympathetic company at Bill Boughton's general store.

Boughton's, next to Odd Fellows' Hall, was the largest building in Grand Manan. The first floor was the store. Entering, two long counters, one against each side wall, extended back until joined by a cross-counter at the rear. Other counters formed an island in the center of the floor. These were arranged in a rectangle with just room enough for a clerk to work between them.

Here was housed every article of food, raiment, furniture, and luxury that had a sale on the island. The right counter was given over to food-stuffs. On the shelves behind stood rows and pyramids of brilliantly wrapped tins or bottles.

From occasional hooks dangled meat, fresh or smoked, and its fleshy odor mingled with the fragrance of coffee, and the earthy smell of potatoes and turnips. On the left a gingham redolence told of clothing, dry goods, and notions, and in the rear paint and varnish obtruded penetratingly upon the air. From the ceiling boots and "oilers" swayed, fresh with rubber and tar.

Crowded amid this medley were a dozen grizzled salts, seated on boxes and barrels or leaning against the show-cases, listening to the low-voiced talk.

Out of earshot, behind a little wire cage, a tall, pale-faced young man in a cheap, black suit, sat poring over a huge ledger in the white glare of a nickeled, self-generating gas-light.

"D'ye find Baird wuth his wage, Bill?" inquired Pete Ellinwood, a huge man with a deep, rumbling voice.

"Wuth double it," declared Boughton. "Blood-kin aside, he beats my Chet a dozen ways fer clerkin'!"

"Meanin' haow?" This in the high treble of little Daddy Meakin.

"Figgers. They wa'n't a week Chet could make 'em come out even. Paul gits 'em right to a cent ev'ry Sat'day night. But that ain't all. He's fixed ev'rythin' so ye could lay yer hands on it in the dark.

"Then them show-winders. Thinkin' haow to change 'em once a month used to keep me awake nights, but he does it ev'ry week reg'lar, an' I vow I'd hardly know the looks of 'em myself. Why, them summer rusticators from Boston-way simply couldn't get by the store once they looked into them winders. We never done such a business! Oh, he's got a pile o' sense, Paul has, if he is loony."

"Don't know as ye'd call him exactly loony, would ye?"

"Wal, mebbe not, but he acts like it when ye try to talk to him abaout his accident, or who he was before. Goes all to pieces like. I give it up a long while ago."

The door opened, letting in a blast of wind and rain that swayed and rustled the suspended oilskins. A drenched, bedraggled old woman entered and pushed the door shut with an effort.

Paul Baird, seeing her, climbed down from his stool and hurried round the rear to the grocery counter.

"Five cents wuth of crackers," she said, still panting.

"Yes, Mrs. Meakin." He weighed out the biscuits from the glass-faced tin box, slid them into a bag, and tied it deftly with a string dangling from the perforated iron sphere above his head. "It's a nasty day, isn't it, Mrs. Meakin?"

"Turrible, Mr. Baird, turrible!" She thrust the package under her arm and went out. On the step she wrestled desperately for a minute with her cotton umbrella and disappeared into the storm. Paul returned to his ledger.

"Funny, ain't it," said Daddy Meakin, "that none of Paul's folks ever f'und him?"

"F'und him," rumbled Ellinwood scornfully. "I guess they've tried all right. But who'd ever think of lookin' fer a man on this island? Ever since our fire the telephone an' telegraph to the mainland 've been out o' commission, an' the only way ye can git a message here is by steamer or sailboat. If this guv'ment would only give us a fair show—"

"Oh, don't get on the guv'ment again, Pete," said Boughton wearily.

"But ain't Paul done nothin' to try an' help himself?" queried another speaker, knocking his pipe against his bootheel.

"Not much," said Boughton, with a covert glance toward the cage. "He's afeared to. Tried a couple of times ag'in' Poole's orders, an' when he come to puzzle out who he was, or what he ought to do, he nigh had brain fever. It's too bad, I say.

"But the doctor an' Squire Hardy tried to do somethin'. Ye see, they figgered that him havin' Canadian money, an' talkin' broad like an Englishman, prob'ly come from some place in Canada. So they advertised in newspapers in Halifax, St. John's, Toronto, Montreal, and Quebec to find out if any family of Bairds was short a man named Paul."

"An' they didn't learn nothin'?"

"No. Didn't get a single reply. That puzzled the squire a heap. He didn't know what to make of it till he commenced to figger that mebbe this feller's name wasn't Paul Baird at all. There ain't no proof of it, ye know—only the writin' on that paper. Looks

now as if the squire was right, don't it?"

"Wal, if I had all his money an' was in his fix, I'd get out o' here mighty quick an' learn who I was!" declared Meakin, with a shake of his unkempt head.

"Ye would, eh?" said Boughton. "No, you wouldn't, not if you was him. I told him that very thing, an' kin ye imagine what he said?"

"No; what?" They all hitched forward into a closer circle, their pipes suspended in mid-air.

"Said he didn't dare use the money, not knowin' how he come by it. 'Suppose I'd robbed somebody of that money,' says he, 'an' then spent it all. I'd be wuss off than I be naow. If anybody can prove claim to it they c'n hev it, an' prob'ly give a clue to who I am into the bargain.' Them was his very words!"

"He hez got sense!" declared Ellinwood.

"Course he hez, but it ain't helped him none yet. So far as I c'n see he'll live an' die on this island without ever knowin' anythin' forward of that day Randy f'und him. Boys, I'm sorry for Paul!"

There was no reply. Outside the wind whined and the rain pelted like scattering buckshot. Back of all was the endless roar of the ponderous surf that boomed at the foot of the cliffs.

"Paul's life must be like to-day sounds," growled huge Pete Ellinwood after a while.

At six that night when Paul left the store the rain had ceased and a bright bar of lemon yellow above the mountain-ridge gave promise of a clear, cool morrow. More people were about.

Here and there a few children, in tiny boots and reefers, splashed and shouted about the brown puddles in the almost submerged road. Others were out on the fish-stand pier idly angling for cod or flat, white halibut. Two youngsters in a dory, equipped with only a sculling sweep, were navigating the rough water near by, while a youth of the village, holding the long painter, guided them back and forth.

Paul hardly saw all this as he splashed vigorously down the road, a volume under one arm and an umbrella under the other. His mind was in another world, a world that was his the moment he had locked Boughton's door behind him—the world of romance that he had rediscovered in books.

A set of Waverley Novels loaned him by Miss Pemela Prudhomme, the village school-teacher, had swept him up into this new and radiant existence, and in it, from six in the evening until the dim hours, he became one of a glorious and noble company.

Just now he was mentally perched in a tower-room in Kenilworth Castle with the sorrowing *Amy Robsart*, watching the distant road for the belated return of the perfidious *Leicester*. Would he never come, this courtly villain whose ambition leaped even to the throne itself?

Suddenly a scream rang out. Paul stopped, perplexed, half in this world and half out of it. There came another. It cleared his head and he looked toward the wharf.

The dory that held the two children was drifting away on the three-knot ebb tide toward the mouth of the harbor and the raging tide-rip that showed its teeth there. The youth from whose hands the painter had slipped was trying to reach it where it had fallen to a spike below.

Kenilworth Castle disappeared as by magic, and Paul, with an oath of excitement, started down the wharf on the run. Umbrella and book went into an empty salt-barrel, and he peeled off his meager black coat with two swift motions.

It was Jerry Thomas, a son of Jimmie, whose carelessness had created the situation. Now, as he knelt on the string-piece, the youth saw that he must recover the rope or the children would be drowned. A quick glance

round showed him Baird, who had just reached the landward end of the wharf, and another glance showed a rusted spike at his knee. Without hesitation he swung himself off the timber, holding to the spike with his left hand. A desperate clutch with his right gave him the end of the dory painter just as it flipped clear.

The heavy dory in the grip of the tide almost instantly drew the painter taut. Young Thomas, sweating with fear and exertion, clung like death, expecting every second to feel Paul's grip about his wrist.

But the pier was two hundred feet long, and, before Baird, racing at top speed, could complete half, the rust-bitten spike to which Jerry clung snapped off short, and the youth, with a scream of terror, plunged into the water.

When Paul arrived at the string-piece he was coatless and shirtless. It took but a few seconds to kick off his shoes, and then, drawing a deep breath, he dived beyond the spot where Jerry had disappeared.

Eighteen-year-old Jerry Thomas was no exception to the rule that fishermen cannot swim. He came up half full of water and in the paroxysms of strangulation. Baird, gasping from the icy shock, rose behind him, and for a moment waited. Then with a swift movement he grabbed the other by the collar and threw him on his back.

The boy fought like a tiger to come to death-grips, but Baird watched him, and, swimming strongly with one hand, pulled him against one of the piles under the pier. Instinct with life to the last, Jerry clung frenziedly.

Now above their heads sounded the drumming of feet, mingled with the shouts of men and the wailing of women.

"Here, catch this line!" cried a voice. "We'll pull you up."

Paul seized the rope as it struck the water and put it into Jerry's hands. Then he glanced toward shore. Men were trying desperately to launch a boat off the rocks into the surf. Meanwhile he knew that the dory with the two children was sweeping swiftly toward the tumble of the sea and tide-rip in the harbor-mouth. He doubled his feet under him against the pile and shot out from the pier.

He saw the dory a hundred yards away, and the tide-rip three hundred beyond that, tossing and shaking its white spray into a hundred fantastic shapes. He could hear the roar of it above the whistle of the wind.

He gulped a lungful of air and thrust his head down. Then those on the pier saw only the swift, powerful overhand reach of his arms and the churning wake that his feet made as they rapidly beat the water.

There were choppy waves in the bay, but he went through them rather than over them, surging along like some sea creature. Presently he flung his head up, gulped more air, laid a fresh course for the dory, and plowed on.

Now he was half-way to his goal and gaining fast. On shore they had launched a dory, and a man was trying frantically to get a spark out of the damp engine. On the pier they had hauled Jerry Thomas to safety.

Alternately breathing and sprinting, Baird caught the dory when it was less than a hundred yards from the tide-rip. With a great heave of his shoulders he drew himself up over the stern and fell exhausted in the bottom where the two children were huddled, crying pitifully.

Only for a moment did he lie there. Struggling to his knees, he seized the long oar and fitted it in the notch astern. Then, obeying some recrudescent impulse of his former life, he began to scull, rocking the dory from side to side with great rhythmic sweeps.

Now there came the staccato roar of a wide-open gasoline engine, and in a moment a motor-dory containing two men careened out from behind the pier and headed toward him.

But, toil as he would, the swift tide bore him gradually back. His arms were aching now and his breath came in labored gasps. A mist was gathering before his eyes, and he seemed to have become some mechanical automaton straining through an infinite task with Promethean agony.

Suddenly there came shouts beside him. A man from the motor-dory seized the dragging painter of his dory. It tautened, there was a bitter struggle, white water slapped in over the stern, and finally, very slowly, they commenced to draw away from the shouting peril behind.

Paul fell forward upon his face and sobbed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE AWAKENING.

THE rescue of Jerry Thomas and the two Dorp children resulted in Paul's attaining a certain eminence on Grand Manan. It was, however, rather the aloof eminence of a statue on its pedestal than any warm recognition of human heroism.

Outside this awe, Paul, because of his affliction, was accorded something of the suspicious immunity conferred on lunatics by the middle ages. That a man could lose his whole previous lifetime in one minute had a flavor of the uncanny; and among these people, surrounded for generations by the folk-lore and mystery of crag and sea, the uncanny was akin to the demoniac.

Nor was their education in the dark and fearsome neglected. Twice a day on Sundays they sat under men who delighted to picture a divine wrath and a future of endless torment. Heaven had very little place in the hour-long shoutings of these theological butchers, for, said they: "All men are damned before they reach their cradles, and damned they shall be when they sleep in their shrouds."

The first two Sundays of his stay on the island Paul listened in misery to these doctrines. Then he revolted, never again to darken a church door—a fact that branded him blackly and forever in the eyes of the people.

He no longer lived with Randy and Sal Masters. Aside from the crowded quarters there, he found the domestic atmosphere unbearable, and early in August removed to Mis' Shannon's boarding-house, a white, bare cottage on the King's Road a quarter of a mile south of Odd Fellows' Hall.

Here he had a large rear room on the second floor overlooking the bay, and here he lived the imaginative life that his books brought him. Occasional "drummers" stayed a day or two in the house, but aside from them two old fishermen and himself were the only boarders.

On Sundays when the bracing autumn days had come he would stuff his pockets with lunch and roam south along the road as far as Grand Harbor or Seal Cove—dingy, picturesque fishing villages. During these walks he gloried in the brilliant tapestry of the hill foliage, set off by the far reaches of sky-blue sea, and found that even here in his prison there was beauty. At such moments he sometimes thrilled with the thought that happiness might still exist in the world for him.

On very rare occasions he would meet Betty Sprague at a fork in the road, and they would climb far back into the hilly fastnesses to a fragrant-needled retreat he had long since discovered. Here, surrounded by a stalwart cordon of birches brave in black and silver, he would read to her by the hour from the book he had brought in his pocket.

At such times she would sit listening raptly, her little round chin on the palms of her hands and her eyes wide with serious attention. He liked her company, and he liked still more the hundred varying moods that made her ever changeable and alluring.

One day in November, when it had been too cold to read and they were

walking homeward from Castalia, he commented on the fact that Esther Lane was no longer in the village. Betty looked at him for a minute with piercing, questioning eyes. Then, leaning against a broken worm fence, she told him quite simply the rôle Charley Carter had played in their two lives, and how Esther had gone to visit an aunt in Newfoundland until her trouble was over.

It was the first speech in which either of them had ventured beneath the surface of life with the other, and it subtly created a delicate intimacy that the heart of each fed upon in long hours of gloomy solitude.

Paul, for his part, inspired her with an interest in books, and she developed an insatiable thirst for learning. She had completed the nine prescribed grades of the village school, but what impetus this had given her had soon been lost in the weariness of endless drudgery.

Now, by the light of a single candle next her little bed, she plunged with the catholic taste of youth into fiction, poetry, essays, philosophy—anything, in fact, that she could beg or borrow. Like Baird, she found a world in which there was perfect happiness, and unconsciously, as her intellect broadened, her will developed. She became intangible and inscrutable to Randy and Sal Masters, baffling their maddened attempts to touch off her smoldering temper.

Because she knew it to be correct she imitated the studied perfection of Baird's speech and suffered the merciless baiting of the village with callous indifference. She achieved self-respect, and during the process discovered that a squalid body was not a fit temple for an enlightened mind. Her garments, though unchanged in quantity and quality, became challengingly clean, her little room shone, and everything that was hers commenced to radiate a certain delicate femininity.

Paul had partially opened the way to these things; but she alone was responsible for their achievement, for it seemed a part of her nature instinctively to seek out and claim as her own all that was best in life and most worth while.

November, with its raw winds, passed and the village settled down to the gloomy months of winter. December bore snow on its high gales, and for days on end the fishing fleet rocked at anchor in the harbor. When the wind had ceased the fog crept in, covering the bleak island with its clammy mantle, and for a week at a time the great horn on North Head Point bellowed.

With the New Year many of the men departed for the lobster-grounds at the south of the island, dividing their time between this work and the cutting and hauling of next summer's firewood.

The winter passed in a dull monotony that was the more deadened and complete because of the island's utter isolation. To Paul the gloomy days seemed a succession of muffled blows, burying him deeper and deeper in his living tomb.

He saw Betty occasionally, each time with more delight; but he did not realize what a part of his life she had become until one still, foggy night in March.

He had been reading in his room; but at ten o'clock he felt restless, a condition due to the premonitory spring warmth in the air. Borrowing the latch-key from Mis' Shannon, he started for a brisk walk along the King's Road. He had not gone a hundred yards when he heard the tap of rapid footsteps and dimly made out a woman coming toward him.

It was Betty, bareheaded and wrapped in a shabby black cape. When she recognized him she called his name, and he, amazed at finding her out so late, hurried to her side.

"Oh, Paul," she cried, half sobbing, "I've wanted you so! Something has happened. I don't know where to turn."

"What is it? Tell me!" he demanded, alarmed.

"It's that Jerry Thomas—the one you saved from drowning. He wants to marry me, and to-night Randy told him he could. I'd been over to the Lanes' to ask about Esther, and when I came back I found everything settled. I said flatly that I wouldn't marry him, and Randy swore I should. And then we fought and—and he struck me. Oh, Paul—"

She clung to his arm with hysterical strength, her white, tragic face upturned.

"He did that? He struck you?" Baird's brain and body seemed to be swept by a hail of fire. "The whelp! I'll kill him!"

He shook off her clinging hands with one swift motion and leaped along the road.

But she was beside him instantly, holding to him and begging him to be reasonable. She had always scorned Randy's bullying rages, but here was a blind, white passion such as she had never seen. A horrible fear of what must surely happen, should Paul override her, lent her strength. Bodily she wrestled with him, striving to penetrate the crimson haze that fogged his brain and that found vent in guttural, animal noises.

"Paul, please! Listen, Paul! Do you hear me? Stop! Think what you are doing! Oh, God help me, Paul!"

Her last frantic cry pierced to his understanding. For a moment he hesitated. Then he stopped confusedly, as though he had just heard her.

"Listen!" she said, instinctively appealing to his chivalry; "don't leave me now. I need you. You must help me."

"Help you? Yes, I'll help you; but let me finish with that brute first!" She felt the involuntary flexing of the great muscles under her fingers.

"No, Paul. Help me first, and then think about him."

His body relaxed. He was himself again.

"Forgive me, Betty," he said humbly; "I was only thinking of you." They commenced to walk slowly back toward the village, and as they went she repeated the tale about Jerry.

"What shall I do, Paul?" she asked anxiously in conclusion.

"Don't marry him!" he burst out. "Randy hasn't any legal authority over you, has he?"

"Same as a parent. He adopted me four years ago."

"But he can't force you to marry. Good Lord! This isn't the Middle Ages! You are eighteen—of legal age—aren't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, then, defy him. You've got a right to your own life, and if you can't be happy where you are make a change and go somewhere else. A lot of people can't seem to realize that fact.

"They go through life miserable and cursing their lot just because they haven't horse sense enough to know that by making themselves happy they increase the happiness of every one round them. You have asked my advice. Now you have it. Leave him!"

"I thought of that, Paul," she faltered; "but where shall I go? I haven't a relative outside this island. I don't know how to do a thing except pack sardines, and—oh, I can't go back to that! Please don't ask me, Paul. Those factories! Those people! If you only knew!"

His manner lost its bruskness at the piteous pleading in her voice.

"Yes, yes, I understand," he said gently. "I couldn't have you try that again.

"Isn't there any one of these fishermen you like well enough to marry?" he inquired coolly, to be shot through a moment later with a vague, rankling pang of jealousy. He cursed himself for that speech and looked down upon her in uneasy alarm, fearful of her answer.

As he waited and she remained silent he suddenly knew that he loved

her and that he needed her more than he had needed any one in all his conscious life. Lost family and friends seemed to fade and become dim, like figures in a worn tapestry, while she stood out sweet, lovable—perfect to his troubled eyes. To conceive her out of his life was impossible; only darkness and misery loomed that way.

With her he felt he had a comrade in the fight, if not a leader—she had done so much for herself before his very eyes. Without her he felt that even books were a dead and futile compensation.

At last she spoke. They had stopped and were facing one another.

"I don't know," she faltered. "I don't love any of them, and I never could, and when I think of settling down here and becoming like Sal or Mis' Shannon or Mis' Lane—ugh! I'd rather die! But yet, if it would take me away from Randy and Sal and if it would give me a little chance to live my own life—oh, Paul! I'm almost tempted—perhaps I could marry one of them—"

Her voice trailed off aimlessly with a falling inflection.

He looked at her startled, realizing in a flash that it was his own ill-considered advice that would send her away from him—that he was outlining and suggesting a life of wretchedness for her whom, he knew now, he loved with a consuming passion.

What faith she had in him—with her great, dark eyes, aglow with the fires of a nature as yet unawakened; her broad brow, her mouth, full and sweet, and her rough hands clasped against her full young breast. She entrusted her future to his keeping as fearlessly as she would have entrusted her one precious little jeweled ring—childlike, believing in his superior knowledge — womanlike, resting upon his infinite masculine strength and decision.

"Perhaps I could marry some one—" she repeated vaguely, and quivered with an involuntary shudder.

"Oh, no! No, you mustn't!" cried Paul, with a sudden violence. His hands clenched until the knuckles cracked, and his indrawn breath hissed sharply. The repressed torrent of divine emotion that had stirred within him moved and rose mercurially.

His starved nature, awakened to its bitter hunger at just the moment when it had refused food, called frantically for her. The sight of her there, lovely, warm, pulsating, and the thought of her as lost to him— He groaned as the fever mounted and the blood pounded in his temples.

"But why?" she asked wonderingly. "Didn't you just tell me to marry? Why do you command me not to now, as though you were angry? Tell me what to do! Help me!"

With a swift movement of his hands he plucked hers from her breast and held them in a crushing grasp.

"Oh, Betty, I'm not angry!" he cried in a voice of such wonderful feeling and tenderness that she forgot the anguish of her fingers. "Can't you understand, dear little Betty? I can't let you go—I can't let some one else have you when I want you! Every day I think of you and dream of you. I pray that you may be happy and that you may have all the good there is in life. Oh, Betty, don't you see I love you?"

As though by some magic transformation he seemed to the girl to be no longer the dumb, wretched Paul Baird that she had known. In the music of his voice, in the simple grace and sincerity with which he bent and kissed her hands she discovered a creature from another world—a glorious figure that had stepped from some faded girlish vision.

But the unexpected torrent of his passion frightened her; his very transformation smote her with a sense of inexplicable fear. She wanted to run, to get away, to hide. But she could not, for as his voice thrilled and at the same time startled her, she felt herself being drawn gradually toward him.

Her senses swam. She struggled.

"No, Paul! No! You can't love me! No, please! Oh, Paul, let me go!" And yet with the old primitive shrinking there came a tide of happiness that flowed through every vein and lulled the outcry of her fear. She felt the warm, strong touch of him against her, the pressure of his protecting arm; something in her leaped to meet him.

She raised her head eagerly and searched for his tender eyes. She saw he was bending nearer and nearer; she felt the imminence of his lips.

Then once more fear struck to her heart.

"No!" she almost screamed. "No, Paul, I don't love you! I don't love you!"

"But listen, my sweetheart—"

"No, I can't. Oh, let me go, Paul!"

"I love you so!"

"But I don't love you!"

For an instant their wills and their souls clashed in silence. Then his gentle clasp relaxed and she fell away from him, sobbing, half regretful that she had won.

"Paul, forgive me," she begged. "Why should you love me? We've never said a word of love, and now you tell me you love me."

"Why, little sweetheart," he said softly, "you and I have come across the world to meet one another. Some power has led me to you. I see it now. It is all in the plan of our lives, all in the great purpose that serves us best. Oh, I feel it, Betty; I know it!"

"Dear Paul," she said softly, "how wonderful you are!"

Away from him and mistress of herself, she regained a measure of her self-possession.

"Do you swear, Betty darling, that you don't love me?" he asked hungrily, peering into her wide eyes, as he grasped her arms and held her before him.

"Yes, Paul. Please, yes. Don't ask me any more to-night. How should I think of loving you? I'm only a little girl. Oh, Paul dear—don't you understand?"

"Poor little sweetheart!" he cried compassionately. "Forgive me if you can, Betty; but I love you so and need you so! I'll say no more about it now; but I'm going to have you if it takes all the rest of my life!"

There was no self-pity in his voice, no miserable disappointment. Rather there was revealed a new purpose that was already a conviction in his mind—a cheerful, indomitable determination that would leap all obstacles and brook no defeat.

"Take me home, Paul," pleaded the girl faintly, still shaken by her past experience and moved by something in his nature that she had not felt before.

He took her arm, and now she saw with amazement that through some second miraculous transformation he was once more plain Paul Baird, the stranger, without a life, who clerked in Bill Boughton's store. While she felt thoroughly safe and at ease with the prosaic Paul, still an ecstatic voice in the depths of her soul called for that radiant being who had stirred her so deeply and who had now departed.

Paul, honorable and unwilling to press his love farther, dropped back into his former attitude of comradeship, and as they walked along the moist road unfolded to her a scheme that had taken shape in his mind.

Mis' Shannon, vinegary widow, was suffering from an influx of unexpected boarders. Two auditors from St. John, a government official who was to report on the advisability of reopening the burned cables, and two early spring "runners" had suddenly descended upon her unawares that day, and she was laboring valiantly but vainly to sustain the burden alone.

"Take service with Mis' Shannon," counseled Paul eagerly. "Then you will be out of Randy and Sal's reach and free from the attentions of young Thomas. Besides"—he hesitated—"then I can see you always."

They were now but a short distance

from the Masterses' rickety front gate, and Betty halted Paul with a warning motion. Shyly she took one of his big hands in both of hers.

"Dear Paul!" she said, and her voice was low and flutelike as on that morning he had seen her first. "You are the only person in all the world who cares for me and who wants me to be happy. You are good, Paul. I came to you to-night and you have not failed me. I'll go to Mis' Shannon's if she will have me."

"God bless you! It will make me happier than anything in all the world," he replied fervently.

"Then I shall surely go," she said, and swiftly bent and kissed his hand.

The next moment she was gone.

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CHAPTER VIII.

DEVELOPMENT.

BETTY SPRAGUE came to Mis' Shannon's.

She occupied a little room that opened off the widow's on the first floor, and there, in a sudden passion of home-making, she surrounded herself with the few pitiful possessions that she had accumulated during her years with Randy and Sal. Then, all day long, while Paul was away at the store, she slaved, singing about her work and dreaming the sweet dreams that come to youth.

But down in the Masters pink cottage there were black looks and threatening talk.

"The hussy! I'll get the law on her!" snarled Randy to Squire Hardy, goaded to desperation by his wife's ceaseless complaints. "She wa'n't any more'n wuth her keep at best, an' she still owes us fer clothes. Skip aout o' here just because she's of age, will she? I'll know why! She's my dotter, legal adopted, and she'll work out her clothes like she done her board!"

"Yes," returned the placid squire musingly; "but what's got into her all of a sudden? If she was goin' to leave why hasn't she done it before this? She's been of age nigh a year now."

Randy Masters leered suggestively and clicked his tongue against his teeth.

"I cal'late it ain't hard to figger," he said with meaning. "Young Jerry Thomas's seen 'em together—her an' that half-baked loon, readin' out o' books, an' all that. The shameless hussy! An' him that I saved from drawnin' with my own hands! Fine pair they be, squire."

"Look here, Randy," said the squire sharply, his broad face reddening ominously within its circle of snowy whiskers, "if you're aimin' at Betty's reppitation, you stop right where you be. I won't listen to it. She's the best and decentest girl on the island, an' if you calc'late to get her back you go and see a regular lawyer. Maybe he'll get a writ for you; I won't. I don't want to hear any more about it. Afore you do anything you better remember this, Randy—lawyers cost money."

It was a telling shot, and Randy left, cursing under his breath. Sal's anticipated shrill upbraiding did not add to his peace of mind.

For Paul Baird the village had ceased to have any physical existence judged in relation to himself. Daily he saw the men lumber down to their reeking dories and speed out to the Banks; daily the shawl-wrapped, slatternly women and dirty children came in endless procession to Boughton's store for trivial purchases; daily his existence was bounded by the iron cage on one hand and the weighing scales on the other. But he hardly knew all this.

Into his life had come an intangible sweetness that had made the desert of his nature bloom as a rose; he had heard the open sesame to the deeps of life that had been unknown to him. Exalted, mystified, wrapped, as it were, in a garment of glory, he lived from waking to sleeping in a world of exquisite imaginings.

Whatever he had been before coming to the island, his was now a virginal nature, one in which an inherent delicacy and fastidiousness triumphed over mere instinct. For him it was glorious to love; to pour out the riches of a radiant devotion before his divinity. He was one of those rare men who love with almost a negligible thought of self.

Nor could this change of soul fail to have its effect on his associates. Women marked the light that seemed to glow upon his face formerly so blank, and men, finding him abstracted, looked at one another and tapped their foreheads.

But, for him, people as well as things were shadows, and only Betty was the reality. Each hour in her presence seemed to reveal in her new lights and shades of youthful loveliness, quaint humors and playfulness, all displayed with a simplicity as unaffected as it was arch.

In the morning one gracious look from her sent him to his work exalted, and when he drew near the gate again at evening the sight of her quietly waiting for him quenched the thirst for her presence that had consumed him since his momentary glimpse of her at noon.

Though little changed physically, Paul made tremendous strides in his new mental development. Life appeared purposeful at last, and displayed to his hitherto unseeing eyes the rewards attainable by purely material success.

Naturally, his greatest desire was to marry Betty Sprague, and yet he was not so blinded by his dream that he could not apprehend the financial difficulties to be overcome. Dispassionately he reviewed his resources.

Boughton was paying him five dollars a week, and out of this he was able to put by one. But, he realized, for two people to live on such a sum was out of the question, even on Grand Manan. He resolved to ask the storekeeper for seven dollars, and to get it, either from him or from some one else with business acumen enough to realize his value. He calculated that, with desperate economy, he and Betty could just squeeze through on that sum.

Paul still had to his credit in the bank the money discovered on his body the day he was rescued, and this, after deducting Asa Poole's bill and other incidentals, amounted in round numbers to two thousand dollars. The thought now came to him that to invest this money in rehabilitating the burned fish-stand might materially increase his income, and make him a man of some position in the village.

He gave the idea long consideration. Heretofore he had refused to touch the cash because there was no evidence to prove that it was lawfully his. Furthermore, he dreaded the prospect of losing it in some venture, thus burdening himself with a possible debt. But now it seemed to him that opportunity had knocked at his door.

From the gossip of the fishermen, and by his own observation, he knew that another fish-stand at North Head was absolutely imperative if the island was to market her regular yearly output and all the men were to have opportunity to work. It was an alluring investment. He deliberated anxiously, and at the end of two days had practically decided to risk the venture when an unexpected occurrence halted him.

As he entered the store after lunch the third noon he saw Bill Boughton and another man under the glaring light in his bookkeeping cage, evidently examining his ledgers. Idly curious he approached them and discovered Boughton's companion to be one of the auditors who had been boarding at Mis' Shannon's, a man whom he knew to be named Burke.

Paul watched fascinated as Burke skimmed up and down page after page of figures with almost inconceivable rapidity. Then, as customers commenced to trickle into the store, he hung up his hat and coat and plunged into the afternoon's work.

An hour later the auditor, his ex-

amination finished, approached Paul during an idle moment.

"Who taught you bookkeeping, Mr. Baird?" he asked indifferently.

"Nobody."

The other regarded Paul curiously for a moment.

"Ever have any trouble finding your trial balances?"

"Trial balances? What are trial balances?" asked Paul bewildered.

"Look here, Mr. Baird," said the other with asperity, "if you and Boughton are playing a practical joke on me, please stop it. No one could keep a set of books as perfect as yours and not know what a trial balance is. Now what's the answer?"

"What has Mr. Boughton been telling you?"

"Your story—and it's a queer one I must say. But I'm interested, and I wish you would answer me one or two questions."

"Be glad to. Go ahead."

"Well, first, do you recall ever having worked with a set of books before your accident?"

"No, absolutely."

"Has any one discussed bookkeeping with you since you have been on the island?"

"No, everything you see in those ledgers I have worked out for myself, thinking it was just plain, common sense."

The auditor stared at Baird in wonderment.

"You're a genius all right," he said under his breath, and probed for further information.

"How much does Boughton pay you?" he inquired after considerable friendly talk.

"Five dollars a week."

"Good Lord! Strike him for ten. He'll pay it and think he's getting off cheap. He told me you had almost doubled his summer business!"

"Thanks," said Paul quietly, a shrewd gleam in his eye, "I will. And now that you have done me one favor, Mr. Burke, I am going to ask you to do me another. I want you to look at something I have been working on occasionally all winter. But first you must give me your word of honor not to mention it to a soul."

"Bring out a Bible and I'll take oath," declared Burke seriously, and Paul, satisfied, led him round behind the counter to the bookkeeping cage.

Unlocking a drawer he drew out a few sheets of dirty bristol board on which were drawn the outlines of a piece of mechanism. The auditor laughed aloud when Paul explained to him that these were the rough sketches for a machine that would divide the labor of ordinary bookkeeping by half and almost eliminate its greatest defect — inaccuracy resulting from human brain-fag or carelessness. But Paul had not been talking five minutes before Burke ceased to laugh and bent over the plans with keen interest.

"It's feasible and practicable," he announced at last; "but not in its present state."

Then he went into detail, declaring certain features to be impossible in the face of modern bookkeeping methods, and others to be unnecessary.

"Overcome the points I mention and you're on the road to possibility," said Burke when the plans were again locked in the drawer. "Then communicate with me. You'll need a patent lawyer, and some one to make a workable model if yours isn't satisfactory. You're a remarkable man, Baird, and I want to do all I can to help you, but—wait a minute," as Paul seemed about to speak. "I say that under one condition."

"Yes."—Paul had been expecting this.

"And that is that, when you have perfected your invention, and have used me to every possible advantage, you will let me in on the ground floor of the manufacturing company. Your machine, if it lives up to its promise, will almost do away with human auditing, and I should like to provide for my old age."

He grinned cheerfully.

Paul, smiling in turn, thrust out his hand.

"It's a bargain, and I know I can trust you, Mr. Burke," he said. "We are really working together on this thing, and it is to our mutual advantage to work quietly. Now, when I need you where shall I write?"

Burke extracted a card from his card-case and handed it to Paul. The latter read:

GOTHAM AUDIT COMPANY
Southbridge Building
A. J. Burke New York City, N.Y.

"Oh," cried Paul, astonished, "you're from New York! I've heard a lot about that city since I've been here."

"Yes, ours is a big company, and the men we send out audit books all over North America. We've been clearing up some regular bank work in St. John, and the home office sent us over to examine the books of the branch here. Mr. Boughton, whom I have met before, asked me in to see your work, and that is how you found me in the store."

When Burke had gone and the afternoon trade slackened so as to give him a free moment, Paul pondered long and deeply upon what action to take. This extraordinary interview and the possibility of the future that it held out had fired him with a fresh ambition for conquest and success, and in a larger field. The fish-stand investment lost its attractiveness in one short hour, and he never thought of it again.

"I'll keep that two thousand as it is," he told himself soberly. "There may come a time when it will be the one thing on earth that can save me. It may not be mine, but I'll risk it at the last ditch and take the consequences if there is no other way. Ah, there's Boughton free at last! I'll strike for more money while Burke's praise of the store is still warm."

Boughton capitulated.

CHAPTER IX.

ECSTASY.

THE effect on Paul Baird of the tremendous emotional upheaval he had experienced that March night when Betty had met him on the road might be likened to the raising of a sunken vessel.

Pressed down by the inconceivable weight of circumstances, helpless in the grip of an unyielding environment, he was immovable, useless—an encumbrance in the channel of life—potential but impotent. Lifted, forced out of this by his love for Betty, he gradually ascended from the mental and spiritual sands that had held him and rode the open sea, strong to speed of his own power to the haven he had formerly blocked.

The period of acquiescence to fate had passed. He accepted his misfortune at its true value as a misfortune and refused any longer to be its broken, helpless victim. He rose superior to it in his own mind, and, amid the delicious sense of rest and peace this action brought, knew that henceforth he should dominate his own life.

Betty, seeing him daily, and spending long hours in the evening reading with him in Mis' Shannon's musty dining-room, felt the change that had taken place. The grave, solemn Paul who had declared his love for her was gone, and in his place was a man of keen, active mind, of serious self-confidence, and gentle humor.

And what a lover he was! His tenderness and devotion seemed natural attributes rather than manners assumed merely until his end should be attained. His care of her, his little attentions, his playful names and intimate happiness fell gratefully upon her starved, eager soul.

Gradually, under the spell of his love and personality her nature, bruised and hurt through many years, was healed of its wounds and became responsive to the play of his moods. The maiden fear of his passion that had dominated her on the night of his declaration had melted away now, and she commenced to regret the hasty denial of her love made on that occasion.

Like some delicious bliss his limitless devotion seemed gradually to enter, dominate, and assimilate her until he represented the sum total of her conscious and subconscious existence, just as she represented his.

Within a month she adored him, and then waited, ripe and eager for him to speak again. But he was not quite ready. He had resolved that the second occasion should be the last of the kind between them, and should be followed by immediate marriage. Consequently he had many arrangements for their subsequent life still to make, and would not speak until they were completed.

Beautiful and high as was their passion, they were united by a more healthful and enduring bond, living close in an inseparable and natural comradeship — a comradeship that took no thought of surroundings or events. Sufficient unto each other, they lived richer lives, oblivious of the gloom of the foggy spring days and the hopeless squalor of their environments. In those days there was nothing to darken the blue of their April sky.

Still, for one another's sake, and to avoid as much talk as possible, they lived their lives so that all might see. Mis' Shannon was a very frequent listener to the last of the Waverley Novels and the first of Dickens as they were read aloud by the living-room lamp, and her tongue, always ready to drop vitriol, could find nothing to criticize in their behavior.

After a month the gaunt widow, fighting hard for the honor of her house with the biting world outside, became a sort of ally to the couple and defended them valiantly, actually silencing Sal Masters's guns in two out of three pitched battles.

As a result of the widow's revelations during these encounters, the sympathy of the village veered and set rather strongly against Randy. That outraged individual was still shouting about the law, but so far had carefully avoided tampering with it.

"You cert'nly do heave up a power o' talk abaout the law, Randy," little Daddy Meakin cried in his nervous treble one day. "If it was me an' a feller was a livin' too clost to my dotter, I'd fergit all abaout the law an' hev it aout with him pussonal."

"Would you now, daddy?" inquired Randy, full of scorn. "Would you hev it aout pussonal with Paul? The feller's a mighty able man, even if he ain't hull in his upper works. You'd hev it aout with him—like thunder!"

"Wal, lemme tell ye suthin', Randy," croaked the old man sagely, "ye may not hev it aout with him, but if he gits ear o' what ye been sayin', he'll hev it aout with yew—which'll amount to the same thing, only wuss! So you take warnin'."

Randy took warning, and his slanders and Sal's complaints died into a cautious murmur that was poured only into certain, perfectly safe ears.

April passed with its moving white rain sheets, and May came, scattering daisies and clover and dandelions through the long, vivid grass of the meadows. It was an early spring and there was a minimum of Labrador's icy breath that held growing things back. So the cherries and beans and peas in the scratched-over gardens prospered.

The long winter discontent of the men passed away, for the hosts of cod had already begun their six months' march across the feeding plateaus of the North American shoals and banks. All along the coast the canning, packing, and drying plants were preparing to open for the summer.

How glad the men were to resume regular work only Paul and themselves knew. Up and down the King's Road from Swallow Tail Light to Castalia there was scarcely a man but was heavily in debt to Bill Boughton for his winter supplies—debt that must be paid off during the summer to insure credit for the following cold season.

Sundays were Paul's and Betty's days of bliss. All morning, with ruler, hard pencil, and rough paper tacked out on a bread board, he wrestled with his invention, endeavoring to eliminate the unnecessary and impracticable, and still to retain the big, simple, central idea.

During these hours Betty, flushed and warm, but singing, helped Mis' Shannon prepare the *pièce de resistance* of the week—the Sunday dinner. When this had been disposed of by the few boarders and themselves, Paul would help with the dishes, so that usually the time between half past two and five was their own—and this was the crowning pleasure of the week.

Then Betty, in a stiff, starched dress, with coat for the cool of the day, and he in a ready-made blue suit with a book in his pocket would start away together toward their secret retreat in the wood's heart.

Swallows and meadow-larks sang everywhere and, distilled by the hot sun, the odor of balsam floated on the salt breeze. From a big, dead stump, the highest point in their glade, they could look down on the village, its ugliness blurred by distance. They could see far out across slate-blue Fundy, and could watch the pallid, changing fog-banks that hovered in Whale Cove or among the islands stringing south.

On one glorious Sunday in particular nature and circumstances seemed to have combined for their delight. "Hotel-ly" speaking, it was at that period in May between the departure of the last spring drummers and the arrivals of the first summer boarders. For the first time in months Mis' Shannon's was empty of guests.

The widow, unaccountably pleased, hired a horse and buggy to visit some of her late husband's kinsmen in Grand Harbor, and announced that there would be no supper for Betty to get other than Paul's and her own.

The two did not read much that day. Sitting on the soft, pine floor of their nook, their backs against mossy tree-trunks, the sun warm upon them, they talked intermittently as the spirit moved, random, murmured sentences of quiet content and rapture.

Beauty was all about them — pungent, fresh beauty of mounting vitality. The banded silver birches that sentineled their retreat gleamed with new whiteness against the forest glooms beyond. The sun glinted on the polished green needles of pine and hemlock, and wooed from the warm earth a fallow fragrance.

Birds flew back and forth to invisible nests carrying delectable morsels. Every living thing, impelled by that glad instinct which, in its highest expression is aspiration and poetry, labored grandly in the work of recreation.

Through avenues of the senses whose courses are indefinable the realization of all this came to Paul and Betty. The subdued instincts of a million years of development called to them. Sleeping dreams and desires awoke as the pool of yearning life was invisibly stirred, and a slow languor seized them.

The spring tide of emotion in both was straining against the dikes of control the past had so laboriously built. Silence fell between them, the silence of self-consciousness. Each gazing into the magic crystal of nature saw the inmost thoughts of the other mirrored there.

Then, as our parents of old, after the Garden, became aware of their physical nudity, so these two looked upon each other with eyes that saw, and behold, their souls were naked!

Each busy with his own revelations they sat long, and it was darkening when they stumbled down the twisting, rocky path to the King's Road, silent

and thoughtful. Once more Paul took Betty's hand in his as he had often done under cover of the evening gloom. But to-night she shivered at his touch and disengaged her fingers.

"Why, dearest?" he asked quietly.

"I don't know, Paul," she said, a little wildly. "It has been so perfect to-day. I can't stand any more happiness. Please, not to-night."

They were quiet during their supper. Despite their self-possession there seemed to be an ominous sultriness in the emotional atmosphere, presaging a storm. Neither looked directly at the other nor laughed in the old comradely way. Something intangible, indefinable, unnamable, had risen between them with a suggestion of tremendous power.

When Betty had cleared away the dishes she lighted the living-room lamp, while Paul smoked hard.

"Shall we start the Shakespeare to-night?" she asked diffidently, looking at him under drooping lids.

"Yes," he replied. "Miss Prudhomme wants the set back in a couple of weeks, so I suppose we had better begin."

The words were flat to their ears—ears sensitized by the suspense around them to more exquisite and subtle vibrations. Betty drew her finger along the volumes and presently drew one out.

"You have never read Shakespeare?" she asked.

Between them Paul's unlighted past was not considered a part of his life. Their conversation treated only of his present second existence.

"No. Have you?"

"A little in school, but I've forgotten it all. I think I'll read this one, I've heard so much about it."

She opened "Romeo and Juliet."

"Yes, that sounds interesting. Please, you read first."

Almost sullenly he settled back upon the old plush sofa.

Betty read well now with a fine, natural feeling for expression, and by the middle of the first scene had sensed the sonorous music of the flowing verse. From the very first Paul was interested. The power and rhythm of the lines seemed to quiet him. As the voice of his beloved murmured on, his position on the sofa changed. He sat forward, his elbows on his knees and his head cocked, in the strange attitude of one listening for some sound as yet unheard. The pipe between his fingers was long since dead.

Betty, absorbed in the story, did not once look up. *Romeo* and his friends, as maskers, have invaded the house of *Capulet* on the night of the festivity and danger hedges them in on every side. At the height of the revelry *Tybalt* has recognized *Romeo* and pleads with *Capulet* that he may kill the hated *Montague* at once.

Then, like the sweet note of a flute against the growl of bass, the love-motif of *Romeo* and *Juliet* in their first eager meeting lifted itself pure and clear above the clash of factional hatred and against the gloomy background of those passionate times.

Paul stirred and his lips moved. The hands under his chin were clenched until the knuckles showed white, his eyes were wide, and perspiration stood out on his forehead. He seemed not to hear, and yet at the same time to be completely under the dominance of this thing that Betty read.

Now *Romeo* had kissed *Juliet*. He has learned from the nurse that she is a *Capulet*, and *Juliet* has also learned that he is a hated *Montague*. The maskers have gone, and there is left that sense of vain desire and despair half-realized that makes the yearning ache of lovers but the more poignant.

Paul shivered as though with an ague, but he was not feverish. He had become very pale, but upon his face a wild, unearthly look had settled. Suddenly he pressed his hands against his head with an expression of agony as though he felt the pangs of a splitting skull. He seemed to be suffering as dumb animals suffer—mutely: to be undergoing some fearful mental and

physical crisis that was seeking to rend him asunder. Betty read on.

Romeo, evading his friends, has returned to a spot adjoining *Capulet's* garden, driven to *Juliet's* vicinity by his love. His friends, tracing him, find him, but decide in open council to leave him to his own devices. *Romeo,* scornful of their cynical observation, leaps the wall, exclaiming:

He jests at scars that never felt a wound.

Then *Juliet* appears above at a window and *Romeo* pauses with a swift intake of the breath.

But soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and *Juliet* is the sun—
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:
Be not her maid, since she is envious;
Her vestal livery is but sick and green,
And none but fools do wear it; cast it off—

As Betty paused for the fraction of a second she heard a rustling sound beside her and turned quickly.

Paul had risen and stood looking down on her with an expression of such sweetness that she scarcely knew him.

Suddenly he began to speak in a low voice—a voice Betty had heard but once before in her life—that March night on the King's Road. And the words he spoke were poetry—lines she had not yet read in the book that lay open on her lap.

It is my lady; Oh, it is my love:
Oh, that she knew she were—
What of that?
She speaks, yet she says nothing:
Her eye discourses, I will answer it—
I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks:
Two of the fairest stars in all the heaven,
Having some business, so entreat her eyes
To twinkle in their spheres till they return.

The momentary uncanny feeling that had seized the girl died as it was born. Paul's radiant face took possession of her eyes, his speech claimed her ears, and, entering them, sank down and wrapped her heart in a warm exquisite glow.

That golden voice expressed all the lights and shades of extravagant passion, and rang every subtle change in the register of exquisite bliss. It seemed to her to become the voice of all the lovers of the world crying out in all the springs that had been and were still to be.

What if her eyes were there, they in her head?
The brightness of her cheek would shame those stars
As daylight doth a lamp: her eyes in heaven
Would through the airy region stream so bright
That birds would sing and think it were not night.
See how she leans her cheek upon her hand!
Oh, that I were a glove upon that hand,
That I might touch that cheek!

Betty felt startled, overwhelmed, powerless.

Again, as in the afternoon, she felt the pool of yearning life within her stirred. The sweet, violent emotions of that whole day, rising, gathered into one mighty wave and leaped up within her in supreme command.

Almost without volition she rose and moved toward him. Gone was any question regarding this strange mental phenomenon, gone were fear and shrinking.

She only knew that she loved him, and that without his arms and his soul there was nothing for her in the world.

She touched him and he stopped, looking down upon her out of wondrous, flaming eyes.

Then, suddenly realizing her imminence, with one swift motion he drew her to him.

She flung her arms about his neck and lifted her radiant face to his impassioned kisses.

"Oh, Betty, Betty—at last!" he whispered.

(To be continued)

Miss Moore

by Robert Simpson

"PARDON me. Are you not Miss Moore?"

Miss Peggy Graham, stenographer, occupying a corner seat in a Broadway subway car, looked quickly over the top of her newspaper into the smiling eyes of the tall, dark man who had addressed her, and in a second decided that he was the most strikingly handsome man she had ever seen.

Peggy had also some claim to pulchritude, being small, dark, and alive, with wide-open, inquisitive blue eyes and the expression of the girl who is learning and earning at the same time. Sometimes she was a very proper young lady, having careful regard for the proprieties.

Just then she was not so sure.

He had been seated opposite for two stations, but she had not noticed him before, because the serial story running in the newspaper had absorbed all her attention. Now he occupied the vacant seat beside her, and there was anticipation in his eyes.

"May I return the buckle now?" he asked softly before she could answer his first question, and his hand moved to the inside pocket of his coat. "Or may I keep it?"

Peggy's paper was lowered into her lap.

"What buckle? I—I'm not—"

The man looked hurt.

"Please don't fool me again," he pleaded. "It is a year since you lost it—remember? And though you seem to have forgotten me, I haven't forgotten you. I've kept the buckle, hoping I'd meet you again and give it back to you or be given permission to keep it. May I?"

Peggy giggled. It was so queer and the hint of romance was very interesting. In fact, it gave her a little thrill.

But her glance, avoiding his, sped up and down the car to see what the rest of the passengers were thinking. Since they were apparently taking it for granted that she knew the man, her courage and curiosity increased simultaneously.

The stranger was watching her every movement hungrily, waiting for her to say something, and with a flitting, baffling glance into his face, she asked very demurely:

"Do I look like Miss Moore?"

"You are Miss Moore." He leaned a little nearer to her. "Don't you remember me? The Elwood's dance—and the little seat under the palms, where you ran from me and made your aunt take you home? I followed you and found the buckle of your shoe, and when I called next day the maid told me you had left the city. I've been trying to find you ever since."

A cynical smile played on his lips.

"That night is written on my memory indelibly, but it appears to have been a mere incident to you, that has passed, with a multitude of others, into obscurity."

Peggy did not laugh. She felt sorry for him, and wondered what sort of being her double could have been to have treated so handsome a man so unfeelingly. She was sure, even then, that she could not do so.

"But I'm not Miss Moore," she assured him convincingly. "My name is Graham, and I never saw you before."

The man's face fell and he looked rather foolish, fumbling rather nervously with his hands.

"I—er—I beg your pardon." He tried to smile, but the effort was somewhat sickly. "You—that is—you must think me an awful ass, but—good Heavens! I can't believe it! You—why, land sakes! you're more than just her double, even to the funny little way you have of looking at a man, as if you were afraid he was going to eat you! You're not fooling me again, are you?"

Peggy laughed low and musically, shaking her head.

"No, I'm not fooling you. I don't go to dances and sit under palms. I'm only a poor stenographer with a grouchy employer, and have no aunt. So I can't be Miss Moore, can I?"

The man looked still more embarrassed, then interested.

"I—I'm sorry. Hope I haven't seemed impertinent? Do I have to go over and sit beside the Senegambian again, or—"

Peggy glanced across the aisle at the spreading proportions of a colored lady.

"Perhaps there's more room here," she answered naively.

"Thank you."

A long silence, into which the thundering of the train did not intrude.

The man stared straight before him, but Peggy saw that he was biting his lips. She also noted that he had a wonderful profile; that his hands were lean and intelligent, and his clothes a perfect fit, chosen in quiet, good taste.

Apparently he belonged to a grade of society several rungs above her own, and it flattered her to think that she looked so very like Miss Moore, who, undoubtedly, was of his world. It was a compliment to her ability as a dressmaker and milliner, since she designed and made most of her own dresses and hats.

"I—er—I hope you don't think me a fool?"

The question came suddenly and found Peggy taking stock of the stranger's chin.

"Of course not. I'm sorry you should have—" She stopped, coloring a little.

"Should have what?" the man persisted softly, fastening the deep black of his eyes upon her.

"It—it's none of my business, and I don't know you, and you—we've no right to—"

"No. I suppose not. Convention is a strict taskmistress. But I was going to suggest something very inconventional—and selfish. It is impertinent, too, and an imposition. May I say it?"

The train ran into Ninety-First Street Station. Peggy had to get out at Ninety-Sixth, so she had not much time to decide. But it was not necessary. He said it, anyway, and she was glad to be relieved of the responsibility.

"I should like very much if you would sit upon the other side of a dinner-table some evening, and—just let me look at you?"

Peggy's big blue eyes grew bigger.

"Oh, I—we couldn't. It wouldn't be—"

"I know that. It would be perfectly improper. I told you it was selfish and impertinent, but—well—just once—an evening to look back upon as one remembers a dream!"

He laughed softly and rather sadly. "Talking to you seems like rehashing things with her ghost."

Peggy did not know where to look. Somehow, she could not be dignified or indignant with him, or feel that it was at all funny. There was something insidiously attractive about the situation—romance, adventure, and a haunting, pleasing possibility that, because it was not very distinct, was all the more alluring.

"It's—it's queer, isn't it?" she hazarded timidly.

"Queer! It's uncanny. I can't believe, even now, that you are not—"

"I'm not."

"But you will, won't you?"

"What?"

She knew very well what he meant, but she wanted him to repeat it.

"Sit upon the other side of a dinner-table? It's unorthodox and all that, but, just once—and then I'll drift and never bother you again. I suppose I'm a fool," he finished dully.

"I don't—I mean—"

"Ninety-Sixth Street. Change for West Farms and Bronx Park!"

Peggy started to her feet and the stranger did likewise.

"Please!" he whispered. "Just once."

The girl looked up at him a little fearfully, feeling that he must be very serious and that she was more sorry for him than was comfortable.

"Just once?" she asked very low and over her shoulder as she moved toward the door.

"Just once," he returned solemnly. "It would be an act of charity."

Peggy laughed—a sound that defied convention, and she experienced something of the thrill of the explorer who plunges into unknown lands with fate leading the way.

A few minutes later, as she squeezed into a crowded local train, she realized that she had made an appointment with Mr. Everard Fairleigh, who had given her his card, and, leaving him standing on the platform, waiting for the next Broadway train, she carried with her to Mrs. Telfer's boarding-house on One Hundred and Twenty-Fourth Street a persistent memory of the sadness that was in Mr. Fairleigh's handsome face.

In Mrs. Telfer's the "comforts of a home" were dispensed, so far as Peggy was concerned, at six dollars per week. She had a very small room at the top of the somber, brownstone house, and was one of a company of four occupying the lowest rung in the ladder of Mrs. Telfer's esteem.

Two indifferently paid clerks shared the "top floor front"; Peggy had the cubby-hole at the top of the stairs, and in a slightly larger room adjoining there lived a Miss Grayson, who was considered "a little queer in the head."

She was a few years older than Peggy, with a shifting something in her attractive face that spoke of a mind constantly troubled, but no one knew very much about her, except that she was a milliner with strange notions about life and a horror of ferry-boats.

Peggy did not eat much dinner that evening. She was too excited. Something had happened to her; something deliciously different from anything she had ever experienced before, and the little sensation of guilt she had only made everything so much more interesting.

In the two days that followed she dreamed dreams, and though her cheeks burned sometimes in response to certain wild hopes she had, she scarcely ever questioned the right or wrong of it.

Mrs. Telfer's boarding-house became more and more somber, till she "hated the place." Her "grouchy" employer seemed more disagreeable every minute, and once she caught herself whispering the consolation that she would not have to "suffer it much longer."

The haunting, alluring possibility that had had birth in the subway became very distinct, and at night she lay awake, painting pictures that were truly entrancing.

And then, under delicately shaded electric lights, with dreamy music floating to her ears as through a fog, she was seated opposite him, allowing him to feast his eyes upon her face, while he spoke in softly modulated tones that drew her nearer and nearer to him, till, with the dessert, she was afraid of the nearness of the coffee, which marked the point where he would "drift and never bother her again."

Then, all at once, he was saying very earnestly:

"Do you know, there is something about you—a warmth and a gentleness that—well—as I've been sitting watching you, I've been wondering what it is in you that exudes an entirely different atmosphere from that which she created.

"You're—that is—you're more comfortable. I can't put it any other way. There's a depth to your eyes that makes hers, as I remember them, shallow. And you haven't that worldly, cynical air which I used to think so distinguished. You don't mind me analyzing you like this, do you? I know it's rude, but—you understand?"

Peggy looked away quickly, and hoped he did not see how nervous she was.

"I think you do," he went on in a low tone. "You are a sympathetic little soul, and, if you'll let me, I want to break a promise. I want to see you again."

"But—but you know you said—" Peggy began against her will.

"I know, and I am entirely at your mercy. When I take you home to-night you will never see me again unless you say so. Am I so unworthy?"

"N-no, but you know we shouldn't. You wouldn't respect me if I—"

"Respect you! Good Lord, child! I—but I mustn't say that yet. You wouldn't believe me. But I am going to throw away a shoe-buckle to-night and—what will you give me to take its place?"

"Oh, please! You mustn't. I'll feel as if I've—"

The waiter interrupted with the coffee. When he had gone Fairleigh asked softly:

"You'll feel you've—what?"

"Only made you more miserable," Peggy concluded, lowering her eyes.

"But you haven't. You've made me happy, and can make me still happier if you care to try. Why can't we be friends?"

For the life of her Peggy could not see why they could not be friends. She felt that he was inevitable, and that she had no right to rush in the face of fate.

So she met him a second time and a third. She could not help it, and each time her dreams grew rosier and her heart beat faster, till her whole life and the world round about her seemed to change.

When she went to the theater with him the romantic stories exploited on the stage were insignificant compared with her own, and when she knew that she had completely ousted her double from the seat of grace she felt that there was a good story going to waste for want of an experienced narrator.

"First I loved a shell," Fairleigh once told her, but she would not let him finish it, nor would she let him indulge in the luxury of taxicabs; which was neither caution nor economy, but a simple desire to prevent him saying that which he threatened to say every time she met him.

She scarcely knew why she stayed the words she most wished to hear, but she felt that after they were said a pleasure that would never come again would be gone, and she wanted to save it as long as she could.

Sometimes she pictured the moment when the bar of her resistance would snap, and he would take her into his arms and kiss her again and again and again. In her imaginings she could feel his arms about her, and her tired head found rest on his shoulder without any effort. It was a delicious prospect, and she hugged it jealously, feeling the desire to love and be loved

grow more and more intense every day.

But she was careful not to tell any one at Mrs. Telfer's anything about it, though, of course, every one knew that she had "landed a swell beau"; and she bore the mild chaff that came her way with a superior sort of equanimity that, if she had been a little taller, would have been supercilious.

Once or twice, as she was dressing to go out with Fairleigh, Miss Grayson, her top-floor neighbor, came into her room and sat upon the edge of the bed and talked or lent a hand with refractory hooks and eyes.

Peggy was sorry for her, more so than ever before, and wondered, in those halcyon days when all the world lay at her feet, what had made Miss Grayson so queer.

But Miss Grayson did not say. She looked at Peggy sometimes rather sorrowfully, and then, one evening, without a second's warning, kissed her most violently and ran from the room.

Then Peggy thought she understood, and the little incident made her very quiet; so quiet that Fairleigh noticed it and asked her about it. She said it was "nothing," but when, as usual, he suggested a taxicab for the homeward journey, Peggy, to his great surprise, did not object.

They trundled up Broadway, leaving the glare and the glamour behind, and passed into Central Park, where Peggy seemed to lean toward Fairleigh quite naturally, and her tired head, just as she had dreamed it would, found rest on his shoulder without any effort.

His arms crept round about her and held her very close, and his lips burned upon her lips and eyes and cheeks and throat.

There was no word spoken—scarcely a sound.

Peggy was happy, breathlessly, almost hysterically happy; happier than she had ever thought she could be, and she clung to him, panting, with the memory of Miss Grayson's kiss and look making her fearful that his arms might relax or his lips become less ardent.

They didn't; and the things he presently whispered into her willing ears would look foolish in print.

She heard him say that he loved her and would take her away from the drudgery of her employment. They would live—Live! and she would be his forever and ever. They would go away to-morrow, any time, anywhere. Nothing mattered but her lips and her love and her; and to think that he had found her, so beautiful and gentle and good—in a subway train!

Peggy could hardly believe that, either, but it only proved all the more conclusively that destiny was not a factor to be trifled with, or true love a thing to be denied.

As she climbed to her little room at the top of the stairs she was tingling and warm with joy. Her hair was a "sight," her cheeks and lips were burning, and her head felt a little light; but love and life—real life—were hers; hers to enjoy—hers to cherish and play with—hers forever and ever!

A light in Miss Grayson's room startled and quieted her a little. She slipped into her own cubby-hole of a place, lit the gas, and, true to form, sought the mirror.

"Gee!"

It was quite involuntary and justified, but a few deft touches put her hair in order and a powder-puff helped reduce the exhilaration in her cheeks.

There came a low knock upon the door.

Peggy started guiltily, but managed to call almost at once:

"Come in."

Miss Grayson entered.

"Oh, hello!" Peggy greeted her. "Been working?"

"No. Just wasting time," the visitor answered in her usual quiet, indifferent way, and with a smile that haunted her lips peculiarly. "You had a good time, hadn't you?"

Peggy's glance shifted.

"Yes—quite nice, thank you."

And then Miss Grayson was standing over her like a threat, and too near to be comfortable. But Peggy did not move. She was afraid to, though she could not have told why. Everybody knew that, though Miss Grayson was queer, she was harmless.

"You are sure of this happiness of yours?"

Peggy looked up sharply, then even more quickly down again, and backed away a step.

"What right—I mean, why do you ask that?"

"Because I want you to be sure—very sure. And you have no one to guide you. You are alone, young and impressionable, and the man has money or he could not take you to the places he does. It is very easy to be mistaken and to slip. Some of us stop in time or are lucky in the choice we make. The others—well—I was one of them. I know."

Peggy studied Miss Grayson in an amazement that was mingled with fear.

"You— Oh, I'm sorry."

Her voice had a little break in it. She was so happy that sympathy was easy.

Miss Grayson's haunting smile became more distinct, and her hand going out, she drew Peggy gently toward her.

"You think he is wonderful, don't you? I can see it in your eyes, and, three years ago I looked just as you do now when I gave up a good position to run off with a scoundrel. We went to Chicago—and he left me there. My baby died and—"

Miss Grayson's grip upon Peggy's arm grew painful, and her confession halted as abruptly as though a hand had been clapped across her mouth. Peggy felt cold. There was a look in her companion's eyes that spelled disaster for some one, and the smile that parted her lips was a ghastly thing to see.

For a minute neither moved, and the house was deadly still from roof to basement.

Then Miss Grayson's grip relaxed; the look and the smile vanished, and she burst into a sudden flood of tears, out of which, with the assistance of Peggy's quickened sympathies, came the sobbing end or beginning of the confession.

"I—I had to tell some one. People think me mad, and sometimes I think I am. You were so happy—just as I was—and I thought you might understand. Pray that he's good, Miss Graham—good and kind above everything! I hope you will be happy, and some nights I've asked God to take care of you, because you are so young and this man is all your life to you.

"Perhaps I have been foolishly afraid for you. Some women can trust their hearts. I couldn't. When I met him I thought it was fate—that he was mine and mine only—made for me!"

Her lips twitched and twisted.

Peggy drew a long breath.

"How—how did you meet him?" she asked timidly, and Miss Grayson's eyes dulled.

"On a Staten Island ferry-boat. I was leaning against the rail on the upper deck, watching an English steamer go out, when he came up to me and asked me if I was not Miss Moore. He said he had a shoe-buckle that—why—what's wrong?"

But Peggy did not answer.

She slipped quietly—without a sound—to the floor at Miss Grayson's feet, and lay very white and still.

ON A QUACK DOCTOR.

By William Wadd.

THIS quack to Charon would his penny pay:
The grateful ferryman was heard to say—
"Return, my friend, and live for ages more,
Or I must haul my useless boat ashore!"

The MAN Who Could Not DIE

by

De Lysle Ferree Cass

CHAPTER I.

ONE GOOD DEED.

COUNT FLORENZ sat in his sumptuous bachelor apartments holding the cold muzzle of a revolver against the side of his head.

The forefinger which stole round the hair-trigger did not tremble in the slightest degree. The young nobleman could see that plainly enough in the mirror before which he sat.

Certainly he was not at all nervous over the fact that in a second or two more he would, by his own volition, be hurtled into an unknown eternity.

Count Florenz wore a dressing-gown over the few clothes he had donned after bathing. The robe was pale green, which was becoming to his high color, and, in some way, intensified the aristocratic sharpness of his features.

"I will make a handsome corpse for them all to look at," reflected he, with red lips slightly satiric in mockery of his image in the glass. "Heigh-ho! It seems that one cannot even die without the labor of thought about it. I wonder what everybody will say when they hear that Florenz von Regenstein has gone out to join his forebears?"

The young man's sneer was not a pleasant thing to see as he slowly lowered the pistol for the third time since sitting down and cast his lack-luster eyes about him.

Everything was in order. Old Heinrich had seen to that before milord dismissed him in the morning.

"You will not return here until ten in the evening," Count Florenz had told him, regardless of the aged servitor's gape. "You understand me?—not until ten."

"But, sir"—Heinrich called him "sir," having been in the family for years—"but, sir, will you not need me to lay out your things for the function at the Hofburg to-night?"

"No," said Count Florenz shortly, "I am going elsewhere."

"Elsewhere, milord!" exclaimed the old man blankly. "Then may I make so bold as to inquire where, for assuredly his imperial highness will miss you, and there will be telephoning to discover your whereabouts. Shall I tell them that you are at the Roulette-halle, milord?"

"No; I shall never go there again."

"Never, sir?" cried the old man, with an unexpected quaver of joy

breaking his voice. "Oh, Master Florenz, those are glad tidings! Would that the old count, your father, were alive to hear you say that! How it would please him, if I may make so bold as to say it, sir. I, too, am very happy to hear it, sir."

Count Florenz was irritated, even while acknowledging the sincerity of the old servitor's delight. He frowned.

"Your garrulity, Heinrich," said he. "grows worse from day to day. You may go now—and remember! Do not come back before ten."

And now milord was alone with his thoughts and the wickedly shining revolver with which he had determined to end his life.

He was, indeed, going "elsewhere" to-night—would never again occupy his accustomed chair by the long, green tables where the wheels spun so rapidly and where the croupier's voice never seemed loud in comparison with the click of the little ivory balls.

He had sat too often—far too often—in that seat, and staked the inheritance of twelve generations of Regensteins upon the checkered baize.

He had dissipated all that fierce old Gottlieb von Regenstein, the Crusader, had wrenched with the strong arm from the Saracen; he had squandered the riches amassed in devious ways by sly Otho, first count of their name; he had been a wastrel with the hoardings of old Karl August, his grandfather, and scattered to the four winds the patrimony of Count Reinhard, his father.

Milord laughed mirthlessly in reminiscence.

Well, it was all gone—the old, old story of idle hands and a restless temperament that was allowed nothing with which to occupy itself.

Florenz, Count von Regenstein, last scion of one of the most distinguished names in the empire, was a pauper—nay, worse, for there were his creditors (how many he had even forgotten!) all hounding him day in and day out. He had known for weeks past that the exposé could not be delayed much longer. No one of his family had ever borne the stigma of a court summons before. He would not. It was time that he ended it all.

For the fourth time Count Florenz raised the ugly muzzle of the revolver to his head.

Undoubtedly there were many who would regret the news of his demise—Prince Leopold, a score of boon companions with names as traditional as his; the *restaurateurs*, the waiters and lackeys who scurried to win his tips; the ladies whom his passing whim had bedecked with soft furs and diamonds.

Oh, yes! they would regret him. There were three pink and blue scented envelopes still lying unopened on his escritoire now, but milord was not curious as to their contents.

That one with the elusive hint of heliotrope was from Fräulein Ermengarde who had danced her way into prominence (and his favor) on the daintiest of little feet.

That missive with the white wax contained cajoleries from Etta, the toast of *boulevardiers* young and old—Etta, who had said that she must have a gold piece to match each hair of her ruddy head, and got them; who had said that each shining tooth of hers must be mated with a pearl, and got them, too.

And that plain white envelope with the mid-city postmark smudging the dainty writing across its back—that one was from Celestine Vauregarde, French by birth and a beautiful devil by nature. Undoubtedly she was wanting him to bear her company again in some madcap frolic of the kind that had already made his circle a target of public censor. It would be motors, wine, song, a bacchanal—something unavoidably the same, anyway. There was nothing new left for Count Florenz to do.

For the fifth time he raised the pistol to his forehead and stared indifferently at his image in the mirror. Why wait longer to do the one thing

on earth he had not yet done? He was ready.

His finger arched itself against the trigger.

The dressing-table before which milord sat was placed angularly to a window overlooking the street, where the mirror might have the advantage of good daylight. It was Count Florenz's whim to have the glass so tilted that the picture of humanity amove on the street below him should be reflected there, and thus be a sort of ironical background for him who was about to leave it all as something not worth while.

As his finger curved against the trigger of his weapon a well-known figure came into the mirrored scene—a tall, well-groomed man, with thick black hair and scarlet lips, the sensual pout of which was public proclamation of outrageous self-indulgence. Count Florenz's brows knit into an ugly scowl.

So Ottaker von Lehmann was back in town again? He had the effrontery to disdain the sentiment of that last unmentionable escapade of his.

"Decadent!" muttered Count Florenz, watching the fellow in the glass, with the pistol still pressed to his head.

Von Lehmann sauntered indolently through the crowd until he came to the corner lamp-post. There he paused, surveying passers-by, heavy-lidded, calculatingly. Evidently he was waiting for some one—a woman, Count Florenz guessed.

She came hurrying up almost as soon as Von Lehmann stopped—just a slip of a little girl, with her braids down her back and the threadbare skirt not even ankle-long. She touched his arm timidly and then shrunk back, hanging her head as the fellow turned to greet her.

He wigwagged his cane at a passing cab, which drew up at the curb. He seemed to be urging the child to get in and she to be shyly reluctant to do so. When he assumed a bullying manner she cringed, nodded, and let him hand her inside. He himself, after a confidential word with the Jehu, was about to follow her, when—

"Beast!" snarled the would-be suicide watching them, and, turning, he fired straight down through his window.

Ere the stunning detonation of the shot had died out of the room a shouting, excited crowd was jostling all round the figure on the sidewalk, and several were pointing to the wisp of smoke that yet curled out of Count Florenz's window.

They were still staring at it when milord elbowed his way rudely through their midst, crying hoarsely:

"Is the scoundrel dead? Is he surely done for?"

Tradesman, housewife, butcher's boy, and milliner's apprentice stopped their chatter and gesticulations to observe milord with scared eyes.

Count Florenz still wore his green, flowered dressing-gown, pulled awry over his scanty clothing. He was in his stockings, with his hair disheveled, and the wicked little revolver clutched in his right hand. His eyes were bloodshot like those of a maniac. His mouth worked.

The crowd scattered frantically to left and right about him, save for the one pursy burgher who knelt beside the stricken man, too frightened to move.

"Is the wretch dead?" repeated Count Florenz.

"Quite; he is shot through the heart," quavered the tradesman. "But oh, sir, do not kill me also!"

Two police officers pushed through the crowd and addressed themselves to Count Florenz authoritatively.

"Was it you who fired the shot?" they queried, waving their swords.

"Yes," answered milord calmly. "I was just about to commit suicide when I observed this scoundrel and decided that it would be folly for me to depart this life leaving him to pollute it further. So, gentlemen, I have sent him on a few moments ahead of me."

One of the policemen wrenched the pistol out of Count Florenz's hand ere the young nobleman could once more turn it against himself. The other officer pinioned his arms with a bear-like hug.

"You cannot do that!" they shouted. "Come along! You must go to the 'Gray House' with us."

"Wait, officers!" came a piercing voice through the mob that now jostled all about the place.

An old man, white-bearded and aristocratic, decorated with the orders of St. Stepán and the Fleece, was helped out of his carriage by footmen and was given respectful passageway through the crowd. He came close up to Count Florenz, gaped his bewilderment, and then held out his hand cordially.

"Is it possible, my dear boy," said he, "that a Von Regenstein has shot down a man in cold blood? Officers, release this gentleman! You know me—I am Felix von Munsterburg, baron and president of the House of Magnates. I will hold myself personally responsible for the count's appearance before the tribunal."

The policemen, saluting, fell away suddenly from Count Florenz. The old aristocrat offered the young man his arm ceremoniously, but kindly.

"Permit, my dear fellow," said he, "that I escort you back to your residence."

Decorum mattered little to Count Florenz just then. He shrugged his shoulders rudely. He said:

"My thanks for your courtesy, baron, but, after all, what difference does it now make whether I die in jail or by my own hand? In either case I shall accomplish my one present aim, which is to escape from the perplexities of living longer. I freely admit that I assassinated Von Lehmann—that I shot him down without a word's warning from my window up there."

"But, but, my dear boy!" expostulated Count Felix. "This is folly! Do not say such things! Remember that they will be used against you in the trial."

"I shall make no defense," replied milord contemptuously. "I have said that it is my wish to die, and, anyway, why deny the one really praiseworthy act in twenty-nine years of aimless living? Baron Felix, again my thanks, and good day. Officers, I am ready to go with you."

"You are a fool, sir!" shouted the old nobleman as milord was led away. "A fool, but we shall yet save you from yourself. My colleagues will not permit that a Von Regenstein die like a common peasant. I will go to them about it."

He was assisted into his carriage and the equipage dashed off down the street, scattering the crowd before it.

More policemen arrived and began dispersing the throng of onlookers, using the flat of their swords where it was necessary. A civic ambulance removed the corpse, and soon there was left only an occasional knot of idlers discussing the tragedy.

It was then that the jehu, into whose hack the murdered man had handed his would-be victim, cast furtive eyes about and took a sly peep down through the speaking-trap at his solitary passenger.

The child sat huddled up in one corner of the musty old cab, her face buried in little hands, through the spread fingers of which tears trickled plentifully. Her hair had come down and lay in tumbled disarray over her shoulders.

"*Fräulein*," called the jehu cautiously, shifting rat eyes from side to side in dread of chance passers-by.

A whimper was his only answer. The cabman reflected.

"A baby by the looks of her, but you never can tell in these days. Like enough she has money on her and would make it well worth while to get her out of this mess. It's worth taking a chance on, anyhow."

Assuming a nonchalance that he was far from feeling, the fellow chirruped

to his horse and rattled off down the street. For a couple of blocks he kept to the main thoroughfare, then turned a corner and made his way by less frequented avenues, taking a devious course to make tracing him more difficult. By and by the rickety hack was jolting over rough cobblestones, and the squalor of the poorer quarter of the city was all round them.

Dusk had fallen. The denizens of the tumble-down houses shuffled along through the gloom, apathetic, sinister, furtive. There was only an occasional street-lamp, and its sickly yellow flicker but emphasized the dinginess of the neighborhood.

Dirty brats played and squalled almost under the cab-wheels. Frowsy women leaning out of windows called to each other in *patois*, or jeered at the passing vehicle.

The jehu let his horse amble down to a walk, and proceeded so until they came to a street-corner that seemed to be darker than the others. Squinting through the darkness, the cabman could see no one who might watch him. He tugged sharply on the reins, brought his vehicle to a groaning standstill, and swung down from his seat.

He opened the hack door and called in a hoarse whisper:

"All safe and quiet now, *fräulein*. You can come out and thank your lucky stars that you had a man of discretion on the carriage-box."

There was no answer.

The fellow scratched his unshaven chin in perplexity, cleared his throat noisily, and poked his head into the black interior of the cab.

He felt about in increasing amazement with his hands.

"*Donner!*" growled he. "The girl is gone!"

CHAPTER II.

SENTENCE OF LIFE.

THE public trial of so well-known a man as Florenz von Regenstein naturally attracted much attention from all classes, and the sensational nature of his crime drew great crowds to the Gray House, which sobriquet is Viennese vernacular for the imperial court-house in the Alserstrasse. Additional policing precautions were required to keep order during the proceedings.

The bizarre and extravagant escapades of milord's wastrel past were bandied from mouth to mouth and made juicy comment, *par exemplicis*, for the socialists. Only the pressure brought to bear by certain exalted personages in court circles kept the name and scandal of Von Regenstein out of the avid newspapers and comic weeklies.

It was bad enough as it was, though. Count Florenz was epitomized as profligate, degenerate, murderous. Rumor asserted that he had slain Von Lehmann out of jealousy for interference with his intrigues. The vicious character of the deceased was forgotten in vulgar eagerness to discuss the notoriety of the living.

A beggar, who ordinarily squatted on the steps of the Moelkerhof Cathedral, told how young milord had contemptuously tossed him a purse full of gold and then pummeled him nigh to death because he took it.

A worthless little baggage from the *Bal Tabarin* circulated a tale of brutality, the pathos of which was only exceeded by its falseness. No matter how incredible the story, it found ready believers, all eager to repeat it with exaggerations of their own.

Thanks to the vigorous intervention of titled friends, Count Florenz suffered no real hardships nor indignities during his incarceration previous to the trial. The warden's own private apartments were made his; it was permitted that faithful old Heinrich should attend him as of yore; he dined sumptuously, according to his fancy, and could receive messages or even visitors on certain days.

Adversity, as has been remarked

some millions of times before, is the surest test of friendship. Count Florenz found that out and was not surprised at results. Boon companions of former days called, ostensibly to condole his plight, really to urge that he evade common jury trial and beseech the intercession of his old friend, Prince Leopold, with the emperor.

"Why air all of our little foibles to the rabble under the cross-questioning of some rascally lawyer of burgher parentage?" they expostulated. "You are attracting too much attention to us, dear fellow."

"Still, I will not appeal the case," answered milord wearily. "Must I repeat to you forever that a death sentence from a burgher jury is preferable in my eyes to a life sentence at the hands of peers with whom I have in the past caroused? I will have none of it, I say! There is no use of your annoying me further with arguments."

One old companion in milord's excesses suggested another expedient. He was Max Sigismund, Count von Loewenhofen, a violent-tempered, reckless man.

"A mere word from you, Florenz, and we will cut through this infernal tangle as Alexander did the knot at Gordium. I know a dozen wild fellows who, for a few kreutzers apiece, will riot you free of all jailers on the way to the court-room to-morrow. What do you say to that scheme?"

"No; I forbid it," cried milord, his mouth twisted awry. "Am I one, think you, who could eke out an existence in exile, and, even if such a life were tolerance to me, have I the funds wherewith to support myself as befits the name of Von Regenstein? Let me die, Max, and do nothing foolish to jeopardize yourself."

"Bah! Man, you are stark mad!" ejaculated Von Loewenhofen. "You are not half the man you were a twelvemonth back!"

"No," said Count Florenz seriously, "I am not. That is a true word, Max."

One by one they gave over trying to influence him, and let him work out fate to suit himself. Milord thought that no one was left to come and see him until, on the afternoon before the trial, Celestine Vauregarde came.

As has been said, these two were old associates in dissipation. Count Florenz wondered why she visited him, now that he had nothing more to squander upon her. He was very formal in his greetings and stood politely deferential while she flounced about the room.

"Oh, this is outrageous, infamous! To think of so great a nobleman as you being confined here like a common malefactor—doomed to submit to the verdict of low citizens! What can a jury made up of such a rabble know of the promptings of a gentleman's mind?" and so on.

Thus she raged up and down before him. It was all very elocutionary; but the reek of strong perfume and an overcolored complexion made her ridiculous rather than convincing. Milord tired of her rant and asked shortly after the motive of her visit.

"Motive, Florenz?" cried she, as if incredulous that she had heard aright. "I do not understand you. What else but love could bring me to you now, in the hour of your trouble? Dear boy, did you think that I could be ungrateful after all your lavishness with me?"

Milord raised his eyebrows and spread his hands in deprecation, as if to say:

"Ah me! who can tell? This is the world in which we live." But aloud he only remarked: "Well, then, I thank you for your interest. Good-by."

The woman put white-powdered arms round his neck and kissed him effusively—first on each eyelid, then on the brow, despite his gesture of repugnance.

"Good-by, my darling," she choked. "Good-by."

After she had gone milord missed

his scarf-pin—the last valuable heirloom he possessed — and then knew partly why that farewell visit.

That night Celestine Vauregarde made one of a jolly party at a certain *balhaus* in the Schellinggasse, danced on a table-top, and, in the maudlin later evening, exhibited Count Florenz's pin, kissing it frequently and repeating for the benefit of the Cook tourist whom she was prepared to pluck:

"Alas! Yes, this was his — that adorable, naughty Count von Regenstein's. How the dear boy loves me, even now, in the shadow of death! See, *mein herr!* Only to-night he sent for me to visit him in the cruel prison, where he embraced me and said: 'Celestine Vauregarde, take this, my sole remaining possession of worth, and cherish it in memory of one who dies for love of you.' Yes, yes, another bock, *kellner*. Do you never drink wine, *mein herr?*"

Count Florenz's trial was largely attended. The court-room was packed to suffocation, and curious crowds blocked traffic outside in the streets for blocks round the building. Women made up a large percentage of the throng—women of widely variant stations in life.

Middle-aged *hausfrans* of eminent respectability brought their children and knitting in a strange, morbid desire to glean crumbs of weird scandal from a life outside their pale. It was remarked that there were as many titled as plebeian names represented in the spectators that day.

When milord was led into the court-room a murmur swept over the assemblage that was like an autumn wind among fallen leaves. Necks were craned, fingers pointed, and some people even stood up to see him the better.

Milord held himself straight and proudly. His glance was the very essence of indifference. Even the sight of friendly, familiar faces, like those of the old Baron von Munsterburg or Max Sigismund, the impetuous lord of Loewenhofen, failed to elicit any visible emotion in him.

When one little golden-haired milliner's apprentice threw a rose down to him from the gallery, milord stooped, fastened it in his coat-lapel, and bowed to her gravely. Then he sat down, the president's gavel pounded for order, and the trial proceeded.

It was a delicate matter, this trying of so highborn a culprit as Florenz von Regenstein. The Herr President did not like it. Neither did the twelve sworn jurymen, most of whom were simple tradespeople with a living to make and anxious to stand well with the wealthy classes from whom big profits came.

Juryman No. 1, who was a fashionable tailor, caught the baleful glare of the Count von Loewenhofen's eyes upon him and shivered with premonitions of many a good patron lost. Juryman No. 4 was a master-jeweler and could only think:

"If I vote to convict this man it is more than likely that old Count Felix over there will make his wife go elsewhere to select that diamond tiara about which she spoke to me the other day. I must be careful not to prejudice these high folk against me."

And so it was with almost the entire jury. Mercenary considerations kept them from all desire of advising capital punishment. The Herr President was anxious to stand well with Von Munsterburg, who was upper executive in the House of Magnates, as well as the prisoner's friend. He addressed the court — particularly the state's prosecutor — counseling moderation, sanity.

"Though this, our glorious empire, is, under his imperial majesty's sanction, constitutionally ruled, yet certainly it behooves us not to disregard the traditions of an ancient name such as that of the noble prisoner, whose ancestors, as we all know, were a bulwark in defense of our homes as far back as the days when Barbarossa led his cohorts against," *et cetera, et cetera.*

The Herr President read approval in the eyes of the distinguished personages present and waxed eloquent on his theme. He threw veiled threats at the advocate whose duty to the state it was to prosecute the accused. He called upon Count Florenz to speak in his own behalf and gave him every chance to exculpate himself. Milord, however, took not the slightest advantage of any of these things.

"I shot Von Lehmann in cold blood as he stood chatting on the curbstone with a girl. Yes, I intended to kill him. I had five more bullets in my revolver if that first one had not done its work sufficiently well."

"But," stammered the embarrassed judge—"but, sir, the deceased had done you some mortal injury, had he not? You surely had suffered indignity at his hands? Had he not circulated slander concerning you, or—or—"

"None of those things," replied Count Florenz calmly. "I simply killed him on general principles."

"And have you no defense at all to make for yourself, milord? This girl with whom you saw the deceased talking—was she not an old friend?"

"No. She was a little girl—a mere child, in fact. I never saw her before, though I think that I could recognize her if ever I saw her again. But why prolong all of these formalities? I admit any and all of the allegations that the court may have registered against me in the affair. Your sentence cannot exceed the severity of my own intents a few moments previous to the shooting."

There seemed nothing else to be done. The man was plainly determined to die, so the Herr President adjourned his jurymen, with the final injunction that mercy is a quality highly commended in holy Scriptures.

The jury was closeted for seven minutes.

On their return it was announced that "though manifestly circumstances made Florenz, Count von Regenstein, guilty of having despatched Ottaker von Lehmann with a revolver, and that without provocation, on the 20th day of May, in this, the Imperial City, yet was it deemed and decided that, for reasons which would be entered upon the private records of the court, a sentence of life imprisonment should be imposed upon the said Florenz, Count von Regenstein, instead of capital punishment, advised of in the statutes."

Pandemonium broke loose. Hats were thrown into the air, fists shook; there were catcalls, cheers, curses, derisive jeers.

Hardly could the attendants and police officers keep the excited mob from overflowing the floor of the court-room. They had to club their swords and hustle everybody out as fast as possible.

There was a rush of old comrades for the reprieved man, who sat as if stunned in the dock.

Max Sigismund, lord of Loewenhofen, embraced him, shouting congratulations.

The old Baron von Munsterburg clapped him kindly on the shoulder.

"Well, my boy, it seems that we saved you in spite of your asinine self," he said, smiling beneath his white beard.

Count Florenz's face was livid. He pushed them all away from him. His lips curled back in a snarl.

"Saved me, blockheads, and for what?" he rasped. "Have I not said that I wanted to die? Do you think that I, a Regenstein, will drag out my days to decrepitude behind prison bars? You have not given me life, but living death, when what I craved was extinction. You have damned me utterly."

"Hot blood!" growled the old baron sagely. "When you have reached my age, young sir, you will look upon things far differently."

"Rest assured that I shall never reach your age behind prison bars," retorted milord, and nodded to the

waiting guards that he was ready for them to take him away.

CHAPTER III.

THE YOUNG PRISONER.

COUNT FLORENZ was assigned to the Mollersdorf carcer, a few leagues outside of the city, and court influence made life far from unbearable for him there.

He was given a suite of apartments on the second floor, furnished comfortably, if plainly, and with neat chintz curtains concealing the heavy bars that guarded his windows. Through them he had an entrancing view of shimmering green fields with the Danube winding lazily tawny through them.

All sights and sounds of the great city were absent here. Peace, the freshness and quietude of nature—those were what the prospect offered the prisoner in place of the hectic, artificial life and turmoil to which he had always been accustomed.

He saw cows and sheep browsing over the sweet-smelling meadowland; listened to the twitter of orioles nesting; watched the flashing blue way of a swallow winging across a sky that was blue as porcelain. The odors of dewy earth and wild flowers were substituted for strong perfumes in his nostrils; a little game of baccarat now and then with the kindly governor of the prison was made suffice for past thrills of the Roulettehalle.

This governor was a genial soul and was much impressed by the rank of his noble charge. Never before, as he phrased it, had "so distinguished a guest honored his poor roof." He admired milord's *sang-froid*, his elegance of manners, and emulated them in private. He kept assuring himself:

"It is best to be courteous to this fine gentleman. There is no telling when influential friends there at court may get a pardon for him, and then he will not forget how I, Oscar Leibnitz, was good in the time of his adversity."

So the governor favored Count Florenz in many little ways. He gave orders that dour old Johann, the jailer, should wait upon milord as a body-servant, and oftentimes would invite the prisoner down to evening dinner with him in the assembly-room, where, with candles lighted and long pipes glowing fragrantly, they would lounge over the coffee-cups and chat as if they were merely congenial acquaintances spending a few hours together.

One night the governor even ordered up four bottles of his cobwebbed Burgundy and, under its warming influence, confided to his "guest" an insatiate craving to hear intimately of high life in the city.

"Tell me of how you fine gentlemen carry on and turn things topsy-turvy there o' nights. Is it true that you have tipped a waiter as much as a gold florin for handing you your cape? What about all those gay ladies whom they say—"

Milord raised his hands, palms outward, in chilly protest.

"You will excuse me in that regard, I am sure," said he in a thin, even voice, the coldness of which penetrated even the governor's thick skull.

The governor bowed awkwardly. In truth, he could do little else, puzzled as he was. Later, he told old Johann, the turnkey:

"A queer fish, that young nobleman—so close-mouthed and all that, you know! We must take care not to offend him, prisoner or no prisoner, Johann. Better give him the freedom of the walled gardens in the afternoon. The air in the open will do him good and a bit of exercise may improve his temper. I would like to know all about those scrapes of his, wouldn't you, Johann?"

The old jailer shook his head.

"A wild young blade, sir; but, no doubt, with some good in him yet. I will see that he gets free run of the gardens as you say, sir."

Old Johann had been turnkey in the Mollersdorf carcer ever since a Turkish bullet, received at Livno eleven years before, had incapacitated him for active army service. He regarded the Bosnian war as one of the greatest epochs in all history, and was fond of recounting, whenever he could get patient listeners, the details of that glorious engagement when Degan Pasha and his hordes were routed by a mere handful of Austrian and Croat irregulars under the old Marshal Reinhard von Regenstein.

"A great general he was, too," the ex-soldier would say, addressing his family circle round the home fireside. "A great general, and the young man in prison up there is his father's very image. They have the same high color, the fire smoldering in their eyes, the same straight mouths, shaped to issue commands.

"Only the younker there lacks the resolute chin of my old commander. He has been indulged too much by bad companions, that boy has. A shame, too, for there must be real iron down somewhere in the soul of Marshal Reinhard's son."

After tirades like these—there were many of them—there was usually a general discussion of Count Florenz. Good-wife Emma would clack her tongue and opine that such wild young men were best in restraint, and Greta, the youngest daughter—a mere child of fifteen years or so—would sit shuddering and agape at the recital of milord's reputed misdeeds. Occasionally even the doddering old grandpap would put in a quavering word, but of them all, Hildegarde, flower of the family, was the most interested.

"I cannot believe," she would say, "that the young gentleman is capable of all the heinous things they tell about him. Only see, mother, how you have set little Greta there atremble with your awful stories. I don't think any one in the world can be as bad as it is said he is."

Then they would tell her to be silent —what could a maiden know of such things?—and pack her off to bed in the attic of the cottage.

Hildegarde, the turnkey's daughter, was only eighteen—one of those delicate, rosebud creatures that, by some inadvertence of fate, are occasionally born incongruously into the most plebeian families.

The placid purity of brow swept up above great soulful eyes that were as blue and eternally calm as the summer sky itself. Her profile was perfect, her hands small, exquisitely molded, and aristocratic, despite the homely household tasks that were daily hers to do. And the curve of her red, red lips — well! That was a temptation upon which many a titled gallant—say Max Sigismund von Loewenhofen, for instance — would willingly have squandered half his patrimony.

The poverty of her station or the ill-fitting garments she wore could no more conceal the beauty of the girl than could a slough detract from the appearance of a forget-me-not growing solitary upon its bank. Rather were her charms made thereby all the more apparent.

Old Johann, the turnkey, and his good wife had strait ideas of how to raise a girl, and kept her wisely at home, where temptations were few and far between.

Having never been admired, never moved by any deep emotion, Hildegarde was, despite her eighteen years, still a veritable child. She was simplicity itself.

Practically the only times Hildegarde ever escaped her mother's watchful eye was at noon, when she daily carried old Johann's lunch to him in a basket. She would hurry along the streets of the little town with bashful, downcast eyes until she reached the towering gray walls of the Mollersdorf.

There she would deliver her burden, kiss her father, curtsy respectfully if the governor happened to pass by, and be back on her way again.

All this talk about her parent's noble prisoner was very exciting to her. It was the most unusual thing in her life so far, and set her imagination to work. She became a partizan in his behalf against neighborhood gossip and would lie awake nights, staring at the cobwebbed attic rafters overhead, trying to picture how the young nobleman might look—if he were handsome—how his voice might sound.

She liked to think of him as more truly his father's son and would tell herself that he, too, would have led the imperial troops on to glorious victory had he stood, sword in hand, beside old Marshal Reinhard on the field of Livno that day.

When a girl of Hildegarde's age and disposition begins to romanticize her inquisitiveness usually passes all the bounds of reason. The unrecognized yearnings of her maidenhood shaped themselves round the tragic figure of the titled captive, and the turnkey's daughter became obsessed with the idea that she must see him or go frantic. Innocent her musings were, but amorous. Her mind traveled no farther than the mere thought of glimpsing Count Florenz's face. She told herself that that would satisfy her.

These were indeed dreary days to milord there in the carcer, with no other diversions than lurid reminiscences or the occasional companionship of the governor.

He tried reading; became familiar with Heine, Goethe, Schiller, E. A. T. Hoffmann, Wedekind, Grillparzer, Maeterlinck, and a score of others. They hardly interested him.

Then milord undertook translating the poems of Charles Beaudelaire, but found his knowledge of both French and verse construction to be inadequate.

In a rage, he returned to the reading of literature, and for a time amused himself by mercilessly scanning the works of every exalted German *littcrateur* for discrepancies—grammatical, historical, and philosophical.

He compiled a list of five hundred and forty-nine glaring incongruities from the works of Schiller alone, and was not through with them.

That night he burned in his fireplace the MSS. of six months' accumulation and walked the floor like a caged beast, cursing God and man in his furious impotence.

In all this time Count Florenz had never once given over his original intention to commit suicide.

Within the first month of his incarceration he attempted it three times unsuccessfully.

The first time old Johann, the turnkey, found him hanging by a rope made of torn strips of bed-sheeting, and cut him down before strangulation had hardly begun.

The second time the governor took the carving-knife away from him before milord could do more than point it at his breast.

The third time Count Florenz had tried to scale the garden walls, in hope that the sentinels might see him escaping and shoot. Instead of that, he only broke his finger-nails in an ineffectual attempt to climb and was locked in his room afterward on restricted diet for several days.

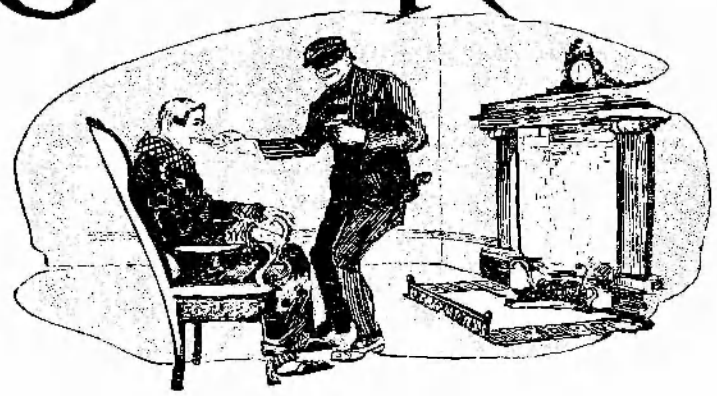
Of course, any and all of these suicidal expedients could have been tried again, perhaps with greater success, were it not that, after each discovery, the indignant governor would make milord promise not to attempt that particular trick again on the pain of being under constant surveillance.

The alternative was, naturally, unbearable to Count Florenz, who promised in each case and, as a man of honor, kept his word scrupulously.

"And yet," he kept crying to himself, "I have nothing to live for. Do they all think I can be made to do so when I do not want to? I shall yet find some means to die!"

(To be continued.)

A Gentle Knave



by

Minnie Barbour Adams

I FOUND the window without a bit of trouble.

I have a faculty for getting round in the dark that Burkett says will be worth a lot to me in this business; but I think even he would have been surprised, maybe a little jealous—for he's a mean-dispositioned cuss—at the slick way I followed his directions.

Of course, it wasn't all smooth sailing. I climbed the fence twenty paces to the left of the gate, as he had told me to, and landed sprawling on the upturned legs of an iron seat. One nipped me on the shin, and I thought a dog had me for sure.

"Get out!" I growled, kicked at it, and skinned the other shin.

Forty paces due east and I came to the house; came to it hard, sort of prematurely, as you might say, and head down like a cantankerous old ram, for the rain was driving something fierce.

A moist, plump bush caught me on the recoil, and no great harm was done, except to my feelings.

Then I felt along the wall for a spell, squinting up in the dark for the little window, and at last found it just where Burkett had said I would.

The next thing was to get through it. I'd rather have tackled a more sizable window, for my proportions are those of the rain-barrel rather than the clothes-pole; but Burkett had told me the whole house was battened down like the steerage in a storm; and it was this one or none. At length I got a rather slippery footing on the watershed, and, reaching up, busted in the heavy glass.

Of course, mere trifles like falling off twice while I was trimming down the edges, and dropping my bag into the bushes beneath where I wallowed and swore, and all but swam, before I found it, I accepted as part of the business; but they got me hot under the collar, just the same.

Yes, the whole system was rotten, just as Burkett had said it was, I thought savagely.

The man that owned this big, stubborn pile of brick and stone had left his shirt-collar open, a shoe untied, or something of the kind; and, catching cold, had hurried off to an evil-smelling puddle in Europe. Here was I, just as good as he, just as smart, and not quite as susceptible to colds, perched on his infernally narrow watershed, with

nothing but the hope of a more just division of his wealth to cheer me in my midnight toil.

This was my first venture; but, by cracky! it wouldn't be the last, I exulted as the jagged pieces of glass went clattering to the floor inside.

I'd tried for years to make an honest living, and how had I succeeded? When I had fallen in with Burkett, a month before, I didn't have a cent—or a sock—to my name. The world owed me a living—

The last piece was out. I hoisted myself into the opening, fought like a trapped rat for a minute, then landed, head on, among the glass.

"And by the jumping John Rogers! if she wouldn't give it to me peaceably, I would take it from her person!" I growled savagely and got to my feet.

To my surprise the door my groping hands touched was not locked. I opened it—and faced a well-lighted room.

A man sat directly before me, stretched out comfortably in a big chair, his feet on the rest, his hands lying along the arms.

"Dear me, but you did land hard! Hurt you much?" he asked pleasantly.

I didn't answer right off; just stared at him foolishly. He had a gun, of course, or he wouldn't be so complacent. I had one, too; but mine was in the bag I had dropped in the window before I had crawled through it. With the owner of the house in Europe, I hadn't seen any sense risking having it shaved off of me in the needle's eye stunt I had just pulled off; but now I was sure up against it.

Here he was, home again. I'd be a nice target pawing round the floor for the bag; a still nicer one if I attempted to again crawl through the window; a two-foot bull's-eye that his shot would find as unerringly as my mother's slipper used to years ago.

"I am sorry you should have had so much trouble getting in," he went on politely. "Especially as the vestibule door is unlocked."

"Un-unlocked!" I stammered.

"Yes; my man Todd and Filson went out that way not long ago. But come in—do? How very inhospitable of me not to have asked you before!"

For a moment I was tempted to bolt. Then the thought of how Burkett would jeer stiffened me.

"Don't move!" I blustered, slipping my hand behind me and creeping slowly toward him. "Don't move, or I'll fill you so full of shot—"

"Good Heavens, man!" He pretended to be scared, but his eyes were twinkling. "What kind of a weapon have you got?"

"I'll show you if you move a finger!" I threatened. "Now, hand over your gun!"

"Haven't one."

"Aw, come, now! Hand it over!"

I braced right up to him, though the thickest part of me kept shrinking toward my backbone.

"I told you I didn't have one!" There was a snap now in both his voice and eyes that told me he was telling the truth. "But that isn't saying I won't get one," he added, laughing slyly.

There was a table with lots of drawers beside him. Quick as scat I butted it back with my thigh, then grinned down at him. He shook his head and sighed.

"You're too quick-witted for me, I am afraid."

"You bet I am!" I blustered, big and chesty.

"But what are you going to do with me when you leave the room?" he asked, as though seeing a ray of hope.

I did some tall thinking while pretending to go through my pockets for something. There were closets, of course; but I'd likely rouse the whole house getting him into one. That gave me another thought that brought the sweat; what was to hinder him—

"S-h!" I growled when he started to speak again, pretending to reach for my gun. "S-h! Some one will hear you!"

"There's no one nearer than that

white house you passed a mile back," he told me calmly.

"What are you giving me?"

"The truth! Todd and Filson started for town an hour ago; they can't get back before morning." I must have still looked suspicious, for he stopped smiling, and the little snap came into his eyes again. "Believe me or not, as you please."

With that, he yawned and settled his head more comfortably against the chair.

I believed him. Men with eyes like his don't lie. For a moment I had a notion of putting him on his honor; then realized that it would take more gall than I had to ask him to promise not to move while I lifted his valuables from under his very nose.

"I suppose you would object to me getting my handkerchief?" he asked.

I laughed, and taking a perfectly clean one from my pocket, handed it to him. He wasn't going to get a chance to slip his hand in his pocket if I knew it. He sighed again as though awful tired.

"I don't want it, after all; but you might take mine from my breast-pocket here and lay it across my right hand, in case I need it again."

There could be no harm in that, I thought; so, before he had finished telling me, I had taken the big silk handkerchief I hadn't noticed before and dropped it over his hand. I didn't stop there. No sir-ee! I'm too quick-witted for that. Seeing it there gave me an idea; and, quicker'n scat, I passed it on around and tied it tight.

My handkerchief did for his other hand; and if ever you saw admiration in a man's eyes, it was in his when he seen what I'd done.

"With that keen mind of yours, you ought to be a great financier!" he said, and his voice was positively awed.

"Maybe I will be—after to-night," I told him, with a wink. "Now, I'll just tie you up a little tighter, and then I'll start in being a financier."

"There's that afghan over there," he suggested, when he saw me looking around for something. "Here! Run it through the chair-arms above my knees, and then wrap it round and round my legs and the foot-rest at the same time."

"And tie it down here where you can't reach it if you do get loose," I added. "It'll keep you warm, too; you seem sort of shivery."

He looked up at me, his eyes getting wide.

"Who would have thought of that but you? I am cold," he said and laid his head back deeper in the chair.

I brought an overcoat from the couch and tucked it over him. I saw no reason why he shouldn't be comfortable while I was picking him. That done, I stood and looked down at him, my hands deep in my pockets.

I knew I ought to gloat over having one of the oppressors of the poor tied up like a bunch of asparagus and at my mercy. That slavering old anarchist, Burkett, and all the other long-haired ranters I'd listened to for the past month, had said I should.

I'd sworn on the head of a molasses barrel in Prochasky's cellar, by the light of a tallow-dip, that I'd help all I could in a more just division of wealth. I'd growled "Down with the rich!" and "Up with the laboring man!" and I hadn't touched my cap to the Senator when I caught his hat that had blown off; but tossed it into the car with a "There you are, Besom," that had made him gasp.

There was something about this man, though, that was different. I didn't know why I should feel so, but every time he looked at me with his clear, gray eyes I felt like a hound-dog caught with a sheep.

It wasn't because he was rich and educated, and I wasn't; it wasn't because he looked clean and handsome in a sort of purple gown that had green devils chasin' snakes all over it, and a diamond ring on his finger, or velvet slippers on his feet.

It was something in the man himself that made my eyes shifty every

time he looked at me. They wouldn't if I had been working for him, I felt sure; but, in my present business, they did, good and plenty. He was looking at me now, and my eyes felt like Noah's dove the first time out.

"Man! How wet and cold you are!" he said, scowling. "Go into the little vestibule you fell into and see if there isn't a coat back of the door. I always used to keep one there."

I did; and when I came back he was chuckling.

"Now see if you can't find enough clothes to fit you out in that bag marked 'J. T.' over there. I know Todd doesn't intend wearing them again."

He was mighty generous, I thought, as I drew on a pair of checked pants in the hall; or did he think I'd take 'em anyway and he might as well stop my drizzling round over his velvet rugs first off. When I went back I found him trying to scratch his eye with his cheek; and did it for him.

"Thanks! What a gentle knave it is;" he said the last under his breath, but I heard, and didn't know whether to be mad or pleased.

"Now, before you begin the serious business of the night— Man! Man!" He stopped and looked up at me, smiling, wondering. "What a setting for a crime!"

"There ain't going to be any crime!" I blustered; "just a little evening up—"

"This lonely place"—he went right on as though he hadn't heard me—"this dark and barricaded house! The storm without and I within, trussed up like a pheasant ready for the spit."

"The what?—Lord, man! you don't think I'd—" I began, wondering what kind of a blackguard he took me for; but he went right on:

"The time — that smallest hour of night when ghosts do walk and graves do yawn and spew their dead—"

"Cut it!" I felt my hair raising.

"And, master of it all, a big and burly ruffian of gentle, nunlike mintering, and eyes as soft and guileless as those of kine."

"Stow the poetry! What is it you want?"

I was getting kind of riled at his making fun of me; seeing which, he laughed and said natural:

"I want a drink."

"Of which?"

"Water. You'll find it on ice in the kitchen."

I found both, and was just pouring some into a pitcher when he called:

"You don't see anything else on the table, do you?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"A corkscrew and two empty bottles."

"Anything else?"

"A basket. It's got — yes! it is — it's a basket of food!"

I felt my mouth water.

"Let's see?"

I took it in and set it on a chair beside him.

"Let's see?" he said again; and his eyes looked as eager as my stomach felt.

I pulled up the table and began setting the things out on it.

"Chicken 'n pie 'n doughnuts 'n—" I stopped my drooling with a chunk of ham. "Ain't had nothing to eat since morning," I apologized.

"And I since noon. Give me a bite!"

I did, and he wasn't very dainty about it, either; just plain man.

"Good! But rather dry, isn't it?"

"Wish we had some coffee," I mumbled with the heel of a loaf crosswise in my throat.

"They had it for supper; I smelled it."

"What'll I cook it on?" I asked.

"I think they used the chafing-dish. Don't set the house afire with it."

I didn't; but I burned the oilcloth off the table, and scorched the towels I tried to whip the cussed stuff out with, not being used to such exuberant fuel.

We ate for an hour, bite and bite about; drinks ditto. I'd busted some boxes and put 'em on the fire, and the roaring tempest outside seemed to make 'em burn twice as bright. I was warm and dry and getting full, none of which, it seemed to me, I'd been for a year; so when he asked a question or two I began to reminisce as naturally as a drunk to cry.

There wasn't much to tell. It began with timid orphan and ended with bold anarchist. We'd come to cigars by this, and I got up and stood on the hearth, my feet wide apart. His eyes were sort of wistful and sad as he looked up at me.

"I understand; go on!" he said.

"I've worked like a dog ever since I was big enough to tote scraps to the chickens—for the other fellow!" I growled, savage; "and, with it all, I've been his door-mat; the springs to his buggy; the rubber-heels to his shoes. But I never will again!"

Seeing he was interested, and encouraged by a question or two, I went right on, and sweated out a lot of rot I'd got into my system while sitting on the molasses barrel in Prochasky's cellar.

I ranted about capital and labor; about equality and rights, and ended by hollering, my hand in the breast of my audience's coat: "Never more will I touch my hat or say 'sir' to any living man; never more will I labor by the sweat of my brow for a pittance; but I'll take—"

A long sigh brought me up short. He had slouched down in his chair and his face looked ghastly in the daylight that was filtering in through the vestibule door.

I must have looked round pretty wild, for he laughed. Then he got sober and said:

"Sit down, Joe: I've got something to tell you."

"I — why — good Lord, man!" I cried in a panic, bolting for my truck on the vestibule floor. "Todd and the cook—"

"Are — not — coming —back. Sit down, I tell you!"

Gulping, reluctant, but feeling better with my hand on the gun in the bag, I sat down on the edge of the chair. He looked at me, his big, tired eyes sort of pitying.

"I have a disappointment for you," he said at last. "There isn't a sou's worth left in the house."

"Wh-what!"

"Not a sou's worth. That rascally Todd and the cook have decamped with everything they could carry."

"But, you—wh—why didn't you—" Something in his eyes stopped me.

"I am paralyzed from my head down, Joe; paralyzed!"

My heels slithered softly along the floor as far away from me as they could get; my hands slid off the arms of the chair, and my jaw sank gently into the bosom of my shirt.

"P'ralyzed!" I heard whispered; and I guess it was me.

"Yes. You can imagine how glad I was to hear you fall into the vestibule. I might not have been found in time, you know, Joe."

I looked at him; hollow-eyed, bound tight enough to hold an ox; but with that brave smile still on his face.

"I got you to tie me up — Man! Man!" He stopped to laugh softly, then went on: "I thought you would never take the hint, though, and that was the only way I knew to get fed without your knowing the fix I was in; and then I amused you in every way I could, for I was afraid you might leave me as the others had done; that is, I was afraid at first: I'm not now."

He smiled at me; trusting, confiding. Suddenly his lips began to quiver, and he shut his eyes tight.

"I'm so tired, Joe," he whispered.

I can't remember rightly just what I did; but I think I stared at him a minute longer; then, with a sort of whimpering snarl, I fell on him. I untied his hands; I unwound the scarf from his legs; I picked him up and ran with him to the bed in the room be-

yond. I undressed him and put him in as though he was a baby; and the look he gave me as I smoothed out his pillow nearly set me to blubbering.

"You won't leave me, Joe?" He turned his head, caught my hand beneath it, and pressed his cheek into it.

"No, sir; never! Now you try to get to sleep, sir, for I've something to attend to."

"What?"

"I'm going to telephone to every town round here to catch them thieves!" I growled. "They didn't cut your wires?"

"They didn't think it worth while—with only me here."

"We'll show 'em that you're a better man than the two of 'em," I said, and flung the windows open wide; then drew the shades. "It's a lovely morning after the rain, sir."

"Yes?"

"And, after you've had a good rest, we'll get out in it, sir."

I stooped over him and tucked the coverlet under his chin. I left my hand on his shoulder for a minute, and, when I could, I said:

"Warm?"

"Yes."

"Comfortable?"

"Very."

"Then, good-by for a little while, Mr. Jefferson."

"Good-by, for a little while, Joe."

The Devil & Doctor Foster

By J. Earl Clauson

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

DR. FOSTER, pastor of the Oxville Congregational Church, longs for a new building to replace the old church which has burned down. He seeks to persuade his congregation to contribute toward this either material or labor. He approaches Sam Tupper, who owns a fine lot of spruce which he is willing to donate till a mysterious village foundling, Ike Jackson, interferes. Ike displays powers which seem almost supernatural, and it is clear that Dr. Foster has suspicions of him.

CHAPTER V.

THE CROWNING ILL.

SAM rose to his feet and dusted off the knees of his overalls, confident that what he was about to hear from Dr. Foster would prove of more than ordinary interest. He knew that only something of importance would divert the minister from pursuing his self-imposed task of collecting material for a new church.

Dr. Foster, moreover, was the last man on earth to indulge in empty gossip.

If he had a communication regard-

ing Ike Jackson to impart, it was certain to be entertaining.

Sam also had been long aware of something uncanny about the foundling. His suspicions, thitherto formless, had been crystallizing since the incident in the sheep pasture. He had shot at a dog and hit a boy—and he knew he had shot straight.

"You mean Uncle Pete's boy, Ike, parson?" he asked, therefore, by way of leading his caller on.

"It is he to whom I refer," the clergyman replied with impressive solemnity. "I am sorry to say it, Samuel, but I have grave reasons for suspecting that Ike Jackson is—"

A tremendous clatter in the yard drowned his voice. On its heels the boy in question burst open the door and rushed in.

"I was hurrying, so I knocked over the milk pails," he explained. "I was sent for Dr. Foster."

"What is it?" demanded both men, struck by the signals of urgency the lad flew. And the clergyman added:

"Is Mrs. Coppins worse?"

"No, it's Necessity," said Ike.

"My mare Necessity? Has she met with an accident? This is indeed grievous news!" exclaimed Dr. Foster.

"No, it ain't that neither. Can't you let me talk? I was coming through the pasture just now and she run up to me and said there was something she wanted to tell Dr. Foster quick. You'd better hurry."

"Something she wanted to tell me?" A light of gratified comprehension broke on the clergyman's face. "Ah, that is very good, very good, indeed, Ichabod. Did she give you any reasons for haste?"

"Said she might forget it if you didn't come right away. So I didn't stop to talk with her. That's all I know," the boy concluded.

"I shall lose no time. Thank you, Ichabod," and Dr. Foster was gone.

Sam Tupper, who had listened to this conversation with deepening bewilderment, turned an angry face on the lad.

"Ike Jackson, what's this foolishness you're talking about the old mare sending for the parson, hey?"

"She did, Mr. Tupper—honest she did," affirmed Ike. "She said: 'Request that he lose no time.'"

"But animals can't talk," the other declared, though the direct quotation, so different from Ike's daily intercourse, was of itself convincing.

"Why, yes, they can, Mr. Tupper," replied the boy. "All animals can talk. That there ram could if he wanted to. Couldn't you, Bucyrus?"

"I should smile," replied Bucyrus, rolling an eye at Sam.

The latter turned from one to the other in amazement. He was unable to make head or tail of the affair, and Ike was sorely tempted to carry the joke farther. Just now, however, he had something of serious consequence on hand, which forbade levity.

"Say, Mr. Tupper," he said, "I couldn't help hearing the parson asking you for that spruce over on the Higley lot to build him a new church with."

"Of course you couldn't, Ike, when you were listening at the window," Sam rejoined. "What of it?"

"Don't you give it to him, Mr. Tupper," the boy advised.

Sam's breath was almost taken away by the impudence of this nameless foundling in projecting himself into his affairs. If anything more had been needed to carry Dr. Foster's cause, this was effective.

"Why, you—you little—what do you mean, Ike Jackson, by talking that way to me?" he sputtered. "A man old enough to be your father!"

"That's all right, Mr. Tupper," the boy continued, unperturbed. "I know things that you don't. Besides, Oxville don't need no church."

"Don't need a church? Now, you tell me what you've come here talking that way for, or I'll tan your hide, Peter Jackson or no Peter Jackson."

As he spoke he twisted a strong hand into the lad's collar, and was impressed again, as he had been before, by the dif-

ference between this and other boys. For Ike's skin was so hot that it seemed fairly to scorch his knuckles.

"Perhaps he's got a fever and I hadn't ought to wallop him," thought Sam."

Ike commenced to whimper.

"You let go of me, Sam Tupper!" he cried. "I tell you there ain't going to be no church in Oxville, and you ain't going to give that spruce to Dr. Foster. If there's a church built, Uncle Peter will make me go, and I don't want to go to church."

"Is that it, you young imp?" said Sam. "Just because you don't want to go to church you don't want anybody else to! Now let me tell you I've decided to give that spruce to Dr. Foster, and you can get out of here just as soon as ever you please."

He released the boy, who sprang back to a safe distance. There was so ugly an expression on his face that Sam was almost frightened until he remembered that after all it was only Peter Jackson's orphan boy Ike, whom he had known ever since he was a baby. But little by little the lad wiped out the lines of anger and hate and a sly look stole into his eyes.

"I didn't mean no harm, Mr. Tupper," he whined plaintively. "Only it didn't seem as if it was just right to ask you to give all that spruce, that's worth a lot of money; and, besides—"

"Besides what?" demanded Sam, filling in the pause.

"It wouldn't be lucky for you."

At these words, sounding so much like a threat, Sam made a step toward the boy. Before he could take a second Ike had the door open and was ready to fly. Then Sam's curiosity overcame him.

"It wouldn't, wouldn't it? Now, I'd just like to know what you mean by that?"

"I mean," said Ike, "that you'd have a lot of trouble over it. You had some already, didn't you, when the dog bit your old ram the other night?"

The farmer stared at Ike Jackson in utter disbelief. Was this the viper Oxville had warmed in its bosom? Was this the helpless foundling he and Wes had chanced upon in the lee of a haycock?

It was the same boy, yet not the same. There was now a suggestion of the sinister and purposeful in his bearing which had never been there before. His ugly face leered, his big eyes blazed with meaning, and Sam felt a cold shiver make a round trip up and down his spine.

The next moment he recalled himself to life's realities. Once again he repeated that this was only Ike Jackson, and he had had the impudence to try to frighten him, Sam Tupper, a solid and respected citizen of Oxville, with disaster if he followed his own generous impulses. His anger flared up.

"You dumb snippet, I've a good mind to take you across my knees and give you a real old-fashioned hiding," he fumed. "Coming round here to sass me when I'm busy. Now you get out of here, and if I see your face round my farm again in a month I'll larrup the stuffing out of you. Get out, do you hear?"

But the boy did not move. Neither did he answer at first.

He seemed about to speak when the injured ram, Bucyrus, took the words out of his mouth, and Sam heard with fresh emotion this counsel:

"Keep your shirt on, Sam. Don't get angry."

He resolved to look at his pet, which fixed him with its light-gray eyes. The situation was quite beyond the farmer's understanding. He threw up both hands with an expression of bafflement and sank on the upturned bushel-basket he had offered only a short time before to his Uncle Peter.

"That's right, Sam: keep cool," approved the ram.

"I told you animals could talk, Mr. Tupper," Ike broke in. "Didn't Necessity speak to me just this afternoon? You ask Dr. Foster, and he will tell you whether or not the mare can talk."

Sam remained speechless and bewildered. He tried vainly to think of the word in season about which he had heard the parson preach one Sunday. He could not remember any word which seemed seasonable in the present emergency.

"About that spruce, Mr. Tupper," Ike began again, lingering within safe distance of the door. "I've just got a feeling that if you decide to give that timber to build a new church with there will be some terrible things happen on your farm. You won't do it now, will you?"

Sam wondered whether, after all, he were only dreaming. It was widely out of harmony with his conscious actions to be sitting here, discussing so important a question with Oxville's bad boy, with his blooded ram occasionally interpolating a remark: so, in all likelihood, he really was safely asleep in his own snug bed, and this experience was born of a piece of Huldah's fruit cake.

He pinched his leg. It hurt a little, but so it would when pinched whether he were asleep or awake. He convinced himself that he was in the former state.

What, then, was the right course to pursue? He remembered a statement the parson had made—that a man of rectitude had none but proper thoughts, sleeping or waking.

The proper thought for him, he knew — and congratulated himself on the clarity of his intellect even though it was smothered in slumber—was to accede to Dr. Foster's request.

"I certainly will give the spruce to the parson," he said deliberately and firmly.

He had the presence of mind to bethink himself that a promise made in a dream was not legally binding.

The boding scowl returned to Ike Jackson's face.

"Well, you can't say I ain't given you fair warning," he snapped, and before Sam could get to him he was out of the door and away.

The farmer returned to his sheep-doctoring with his mind in a maze. When that task was ended he took Shep and went after the cows, which it was his duty that evening to milk unaided, Wes being engaged in drawing and spreading manure. He carried the milk to the dairy, strained it into the pans, and performed the other routine tasks of the farm as usual, all the time wondering at the extent and realism of his dream from which he would presently waken for breakfast.

He had just finished throwing down the hay for the horses when the deep-toned bell on the back porch sounded.

"Huldah must have got supper early to-night," he thought. "But, there, things never do go quite straight in dreams."

The bell sounded again, more insistently, and the farmer realized that this was a summons unlike that for meals. Dropping his pitchfork, he started for the house on the run.

Deborah Stevens, visibly excited, stood on the porch awaiting his appearance.

"Hurry, Sam, hurry!" she cried. "Sam's had a fit and upset all the milk in the dairy. The gray cat's fallen down the well. Huldah's gone to the Ladies' Aid, and when I started the stove for supper the chimney caught fire. Gid Tarbell's bull is loose in the front yard, so I dassent leave the house. Hurry up quick!"

Between so many calls on his attention Sam stopped, puzzled. This was just the way things happened in dreams, which was the only gleam of satisfaction he derived from the chaos. Deborah, who had vanished after her rehearsal, came out again.

"The bull's in Huldah's flower-beds, and the chimney's roaring like a royal Bengal tiger," she called. "Shep's crawled under the stove, and I'm afraid he'll tip it over. Do hurry up!"

Even if it were a dream, Sam knew he must stick to the path of duty—

though, with so many duties, he hardly knew which one to perform first. The rescue of Huldah's flower-beds struck him as paramount.

He rushed into the barn and got his pitchfork, with the aid of which he chased Tarbell's pet out upon the highway and some distance toward its pasture.

Then he dashed back to the house. Entering the back door, he found the kitchen full of smoke. He grabbed the salt-bag, climbed up the porch-support to the low roof of the ell, and emptied the salt down the chimney, severely singeing his hands in the process and swallowing quantities of pitchy smoke. As he descended his foot slipped and he began to roll.

There was nothing betweeen him and the ground but a basket of eggs which had been set out beside the porch to be carried down to Ben Gray's store. Sam lighted sitting down and scrambled six dozen quicker than it had ever been done before in Oxville. He thought that all of his teeth had been shaken loose, but was reassured on feeling them and turned his attention to the rescue of the cat.

When he succeeded in rescuing poor pussy she was beyond first-aid methods. Wes, coming in for supper, found Deborah crying over the corpse, and Sam fixing up a bed for Shep, now over his fit and weak and docile. The hired man took a quick glance round, comprehended the state of the kitchen, noted the annihilated eggs and Sam's rueful countenance, and exclaimed:

"I've always heard it, and now I believe it!"

"Believe what, Wes?" Sam demanded.

"That two-headed calves bring bad luck."

"What do you mean? We ain't got any two-headed calf."

"Yes, we have, too. Lady Alys had her calf to-day out in the pasture, and it's got two heads."

It was the crowning misfortune.

Sam felt crushed. It was not alone that a two-headed calf had been born on the farm, though that was bad enough, but that it should have been born to Lady Alys was piling disaster on variegated trouble.

For Lady Alys was a creature of gentle blood; the father of the calf was the aristocrat of the countryside, and Sam's hopes of converting their offspring into a large amount of cash were suddenly dashed to the ground. What next?

Now he knew he was not dreaming. Ike Jackson had predicted disaster, and a generous portion had already arrived.

Where might the sequence lead if he persisted in his determination to give the spruce on the Higley lot to Dr. Foster?

CHAPTER VI.

A HINT OF TREASURE.

In the cool of the evening Sam and Huldah sat on the front piazza, intermittently conversing. At the other end, a totally distinct group, were Deborah, Jere Cogswell, and Jake Pugsley's boy Clarence, as he was known to Oxville.

Having discussed the exciting events of the late afternoon until the subject was for the time being exhausted, Huldah and Sam were content to listen to what they could overhear of the young people's conversation.

The accident damages were lighter than they had looked in the midst of the turmoil. Six dozen eggs were irretrivably messed, which hurt Huldah's feelings the more because the egg-money was her own, to do with as she pleased. Shep's rampageous sickness had spoiled a large amount of milk.

The kitchen chimney was all the better for the fire which had cleaned it out, and the cat which had committed suicide in the well could easily be spared, being the poorest mouser of the nine which made their home with the Tuppers.

"Those overalls will wash, all right, Sam," Huldah reassured him. "It's a mercy you didn't have your Sunday trousers on. They're so tight they certainly would have split."

"But I never do wear my Sunday trousers when I milk, Huldah," Sam returned.

He was feeling a little aggrieved because his wife appeared to lay more stress on the injury to his clothes than to his person.

"No, of course you don't. Just hear those boys talk."

Clarence Pugsley was being interrupted in his theories of the Congregational Church fire by scoffing remarks from Jere Cogswell, while Deborah held happily aloof, saying no more than was necessary to keep the argument at the proper heat.

"You've got to think of everybody who might have done it, and then pick out the likeliest one and find where he was when the fire was set," declared Clarence aggressively. "If he can't account for himself, slap into jail he goes. Old Sleuth didn't fool with them long."

His voice was loud and his manner assertive. Clarence's debating style was of the hammer-and-tongs variety.

"Very crude, very crude!" murmured Jere Cogswell's silky tones. "Then, I suppose, you would put the thumbscrews on and extort a confession, the way they did during the Spanish inquisition?"

"I don't know anything about the Spanish inquisition; but if it wasn't for the third degree, what use do you suppose our jails would be?"

"By inductive methods—" Jere began.

Clarence interrupted.

"Rats! I've heard you talk about inductive methods till I'm tired. I don't believe you know what inductive methods are, anyway."

"That's one you're just using," Jere returned.

"What's one?"

"You argue that because you don't know, nobody does. That's induction, but very, very crude—footless, in fact. Inductive methods demand exact observation, correct interpretation of the facts observed, rational explanation, and scientific construction."

Clarence was momentarily taken aback by this display of erudition, which left him as wise as before. He felt obliged to put himself forward.

"Bet you I get the fellow that set the fire before you do," he blustered.

"In other words," Jere returned, "you propose a demonstration of methods. It suits me exactly, particularly because I had already decided to bring the culprit to justice."

"I'll bet you — five dollars," said Clarence, sitting back in his chair and crossing one tightly trousered leg over the other with the air of a man who has delivered a clincher.

But Deborah saw fit to interpose.

"Wouldn't that be gambling?" she asked fearfully.

"Not at all—not at all, Deborah," declared Jere. "Simply a *quid pro quo*, so to speak. The one who succeeds can pay the other out of the sixty-two dollars reward offered by the selectmen."

"But it sounds like gambling, so you mustn't do it," Deborah persisted. "Receiving a reward and making a bet are quite different matters."

"I ain't afraid," Clarence boasted.

"Wait—I have it," said Deborah. "I will offer a reward, too. That will make everything all right. Whoever succeeds in discovering the person that set fire to the church will get the reward the selectmen offer and the one I will give, and you boys mustn't bet —will you?"

"What sort of reward will you give, Deborah?" Jere asked.

"I haven't decided, but it will be something very nice. You must let me consider," said the girl. "Now, promise me you won't do any dreadful thing like gambling."

Jere promised readily, and Clarence after a proper amount of remon-

strance, just enough to prove that he really was a sporting character. When it was all settled conversation was diverted into a discussion of the grange picnic, which was always held just before haying began.

Sam, with half his mind on the conversation of the young folks, was revolving with the other half the singular threats Ike Jackson had advanced during the stormy interview of the afternoon, and at last decided to lay his perplexities before his wife. Her matter-of-fact common sense had often cleared his problems for him. Accordingly, he told her of the visit from Ike Jackson.

"He said Dr. Foster's mare had told him to get the parson, did he?" asked Huldah, beginning in her practical way at the beginning.

"That's what he said, and the parson didn't seem at all surprised, either."

"The little liar!" exclaimed Mrs. Tupper. "I don't see how Uncle Peter can bear to have him round, even if he does get four dollars a month for his keep. And Mrs. Jackson's crazy about him. She says he is so gentlemanly."

"Then you don't think, Huldah, that the mare sent for the parson?"

"What foolishness, Sam! How could Necessity send for the parson? Next thing you know Ike will be telling round that he got a letter from her."

"But Bucyrus talked, too," Sam argued.

"I do believe you're getting softening of the brain, Sam Tupper," declared his wife. "To think of you, a taxpayer, hearing noises like that! I don't know what's coming over you."

"And after Ike said I would have bad luck all those other things happened to once," Sam persisted.

"They would have happened, anyway. What could Ike Jackson have to do with the chimney catching fire or you falling off the roof? Certainly, he wasn't responsible for the calf. I don't say but what he might have thrown the cat down the well and poisoned Shep, for he's quite capable of it. But those other things just happened."

"Then you don't believe—" Sam began.

"I don't believe anything but that Ike's a real bad boy and would make all the trouble he could. But he never acted more than half-witted to me," Huldah declared with conviction. "And half-witted people can't be more than half as mean as people that have all their faculties, try they ever so hard. Why, who's that?"

The figure of a woman was entering the front gate, and by her walk Sam and Huldah determined before she was half-way across the yard that it was Mrs. Jackson coming to pay an evening call.

"I'll just run in the house and change into my other dress," said Huldah hurriedly. "If she sees me sitting out here in my calico she will tell everybody how slovenly I'm getting since I married you, Sam."

Mrs. Jackson took the chair Sam offered, and began to fan herself vigorously. She had been growing fat since her reunion with Uncle Peter after the latter's long absence in foreign parts, and with added weight was troubled with shortness of breath.

She had had time only to pass the customary remarks on the weather before Huldah reappeared.

"Ike and me just thought we would run in a few minutes, Huldah," Mrs. Jackson announced. "I was asked to tea over to the Bellowses, and Ike came after me. He's so attentive, the little dear!"

"But he isn't with you now, Mrs. Jackson," said Sam, looking hastily around.

"No, he's just at the bashful age now, Sam, and he wouldn't come up. I wouldn't wonder if you found him round in the side yard playing with the cats. Seems though I never knew a boy so fond of cats as Ike is."

The thought of Ike turned loose in the yard without supervision disturbed Sam so much that a moment later he excused himself and went in search of the lad. Ike was not in the side yard, and the farmer continued his search toward the barn.

Here he found Ike. He came upon him from behind and stood for a moment transfixed by the odd spectacle the lad presented.

Ike had found Sam's three-tined pitchfork leaning against the barn door, where the farmer had carelessly left it after chasing Gideon Tarbell's bull out of Huldah's flower-beds, and was juggling it as a skilful drum major juggles his baton. Evidently it was a toy greatly to his taste.

He swung it round his head in dangerous circles, tossed it high into the air, and caught it before it touched the ground, and then attacked with the tines some imaginary enemy, stabbing and prodding with meaningless ferocity. Following this performance, he balanced the fork on his chin, his forehead, and the tip of a finger.

Sam stood by, amazed. It had never occurred to him before that any one could look on a pitchfork as otherwise than an implement of labor. Even Satan, in the pictures which adorned the old illustrated Bible handed down in the Tupper family, carried his pitchfork in an extremely businesslike way. The sight he was witnessing started his speculations in their old groove again.

After a few minutes, tiring of his sport, the boy leaned on his pitchfork to rest. Sam concluded it might be safe to address him.

"What you doing, Ike?" he inquired affably.

Ike jumped, dropped the fork, and turned an abashed face toward the farmer.

"I wa'n't doing nothing," he replied, and added petulantly: "Seems though you're always spying on me, Sam Tupper."

"Mebbe so and mebbe not," returned Sam guardedly. "Anyway, sometimes I think you'll bear watching."

"Where's Augusta, Mr. Tupper?" the lad asked.

Augusta was the name of the cat which had met with misfortune during the afternoon, and Ike's question struck Sam as significant. He parleyed.

"What do you want to know for?"

"Oh, nothing!" the boy turned him off. "Say, Mr. Tupper, about that spruce now—"

"I don't know what you're pestering me about that spruce for, Ike Jackson," Sam interrupted with heat. "I told you I'd made up my mind to do as the parson says—and that's enough, ain't it? What difference does it make to you, anyway? You never went to church in the old one except once, and then you disgraced Mis' Jackson by saying the Lord's Prayer backward."

"Mebbe I'd have to go to the new one if they built it," Ike explained. "Anyway, Mrs. Jackson cried every Sunday because I didn't go, and it sort of spoiled my appetite."

"So much more in Uncle Pete's pocket," thought Sam to himself.

"Say, Mr. Tupper—"

"Well, what is it?"

"I could make it worth your while not to give Dr. Foster that spruce timber."

"Why, you gosh-all-hemlock little cuss!" Sam cried, swearing the worst oath he knew at the boy's persistence. "How could you make anything worth anybody's while? You ain't got nothing, and Uncle Pete wouldn't help you. And him a professor himself."

It was true that, under the moral suasion of his wife's tears, Uncle Peter had become a fairly steady churchgoer since his return to Oxville, though to call him a professor was perhaps straining the fact. But the argument was ineffective with Ike.

"Suppose I knew something you didn't know—something hid on your

farm that was better'n all the spruce timber in Oxville?"

"Now, what do you mean by that?" Sam demanded. "Sufferin' Moses, it tires me worse than a day in the hay-field to talk with you! Why can't you speak up like other folks?"

"I ain't going to tell till you promise," said Ike.

"Well, I ain't going to make any promises, and you'd better hyper along, or Mrs. Jackson'll be wanting you," Sam warned. "Trying to make a fool of me with such flapdoodle talk as that!"

He grew quite indignant at the thought that this was the same method the boy would have employed with one of his own age. His attitude was lacking the respect Sam's years and position in the community commanded.

But the lad lingered, digging the toe of one ill-fitting shoe into the instep of the other. Sam watched him suspiciously.

"If I could show you that I ain't trying to cheat, would you promise?" he asked at length.

The suggestion of a bargain appealed to Sam's Yankee instincts. He delighted in swapping, and flattered himself that generally he got the better of a deal. Ike had hit upon the right way to enlist his attention.

"I might think of it," he replied. "But you needn't go playing any of your tricks on me, you little cuss! Your Uncle Samuel is too cute for you to monkey with."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that, Mr. Tupper!" the boy returned earnestly. "Honest I wouldn't."

"Do you mean to say you know of something hid on this farm that's valuable—probably treasure or anything like that?"

"Now, how'd you guess?" asked Ike. "P'r'aps you know where it is and won't promise."

"I won't promise anything, anyway. I said I'd think about it."

Sam was not to be led into recklessness, even though his interest was greatly roused.

It was not impossible that somewhere on his two hundred acres there actually was treasure. Oxville had the usual village tradition of a lost silver-mine, worked in prehistoric times by three swarthy strangers, who had vanished suddenly and mysteriously, leaving no clue to the scene of their operations. It was as likely this mine was on the Tupper farm as anywhere else.

"There is something—I ain't saying what," said Ike. "I might keep it all to myself; but I sort of like you, and would rather you'd have it. Besides"—as if he feared the latter statement was overdrawn—"Uncle Peter would take it away from me and beat me with the hoe-handle, like he does often."

"Why, you poor little feller," Sam exclaimed, his sympathy roused, "I didn't know he abused you so! Now, about this treasure—"

"I didn't say it was treasure, but I'm going to show you because you're a friend of mine," the boy declared.

"All right. Let's go now," Sam suggested eagerly.

"I can't go to-night. But to-morrow night, at twelve o'clock—"

"Twelve o'clock!" ejaculated Sam, aghast.

It was an unheard of hour for Oxville.

"We've got to be careful they don't anybody see us," the boy explained. "You can bring a lantern."

Sam meditated briefly. It was as much as his reputation was worth to be abroad at that hour; but, on the other hand, there might be something of real value to be gained. His cupidity overcame his distrust.

"All right, then. Twelve o'clock," he agreed.

"In the sheep pasture, where I was the other night."

"When you were looking for a peeteeweet's nest?"

"And if you bring Wes Smithers or

ny one I won't show you," the boy concluded. "Wes threatened to raw-hide me once, and I'm afraid of him."

"Don't you be scared, young feller; I won't bring any one," Sam promised. "At twelve o'clock, over in the sheep pasture. And if any one ever tries to kick on you just you let me know. I'll see that you ain't abused."

CHAPTER VII.

THE GOLDEN TRAIL.

As long as he lives Sam Tupper will remember the night of his assignation with Ike Jackson. Its least incident, blown to the whisper of the wind through the tree-tops, is indelibly graven on the tablets of his mind.

He was fortunate at the inception of the adventure. His fears that leaving the house at the unearthly hour set by the uncanny orphan would involve tedious explanations to Huldah proved unfounded; for she went to bed unusualy early—leaving Sam sitting up over the Winston *Review*, that day off the press—and, being tired from a day of house-cleaning, promptly fell asleep.

As nine o'clock, his customary hour for retiring, arrived it found Sam yawning. A half-hour later he was unable to keep his eyes open any longer, and curled up on the sitting-room couch for a little nap. He awoke an hour and a half afterward with a guilty start was relieved at learning from the kitchn clock that he could still be in time, and, boots in hand, silently let himself out into the yard.

The moon, now beginning to wane, swung high above Haystack Mountain, and touched familiar objects with a ghostly light. Sam was glad of its presence, nevertheless, since it made it unnecessary for him to use the lantern he had with forethought set on the sill of the barn door. He could find his way to the rendezvous without its aid.

The sheep pasture at this hour looked so strange that he found himself wondering whether it were really his own. Along its foot, where Roaring Brook ran, hung a white mist, like a newly made lake, altering the aspect of everything.

As he picked his way across the hummocks with which the pasture was dotted, the mournful, long-drawn howl of a dog not very far away struck on his ear.

"I thought Shep was shut up in the barn," he said to himself. "Still, he might be howling there, same as any place else."

He had never heard Shep howl in this fashion, but it was the only explanation which satisfied him. What he could not understand was that the nearer he drew to the point for which he was making the more distinct the howling became.

"Probably it's Lije Hendrick's hound," he said, "out on a fox-trail. I never did see much use in them long-eared dogs. I wonder if old Mrs. Coppins has died."

The howl of a dog is a sign of death in Oxville, as everywhere else in the civilized world. And it was quite likely that Mrs. Coppins, whose display of vitality had surprised every one, had passed away during the night.

The howling ceased when Sam was about half-way across the big pasture, but something else happened which gave him a tremendous start. A soft, wet, cold object was thrust into the hand which swung at his side.

At the moment this occurred he was in open land, without a tree or a shrub within a hundred yards. His scalp crawled, his hair stiffened without his understanding why, and it was some seconds ere he dared look around. All the while this soft, cold, moist thing, obviously alive, was poking at his hand.

Then, turning, he burst into a nervous laugh.

"Sam Tupper, you're getting worse'n an old woman scared of the dark," he told himself.

For the object which had caused him alarm was nothing more serious than the muzzle of Bucyrus, his ram, that

day turned out to pasture with the rest of the flock again. Seeing its master, it had run up to receive, perchance, a lump of salt, its favorite dainty.

The presence of the sheep fortified Sam against the terrors which surrounded him, and now he struck out more boldly, with the ram trotting behind. He reached the blackberry tangle, poked his way through, and was greeted with another prolonged, doleful howl, starting on a high key and ranging down the scale.

It was so close at hand that Sam jumped back. Perched on the hummock across which Ike Jackson had sprawled a few nights earlier was a big black dog, the same, Sam did not doubt, that had ravaged his flock. Its back was to Sam, and its nose was pointed at the waning moon, which it bayed enthusiastically.

The noise the man made in the brambles drew its attention. With a single bound it was off and out of sight.

"By gravy, if I'd only brought the gun!" thought Sam. "What a chance!"

The opportunity was gone, however, and he looked round for Ike. He figured that it must be about the appointed hour, but the boy was not in sight. Bucyrus had fallen to cropping the short grass a few feet away, looking up from time to time to make certain his owner did not desert him. Suddenly Sam was startled by the sharp, warning hiss of a snake.

He leaped hastily to one side, as actively as and farther than Wes had on the evening of their other visit to this same spot. His action was applauded with what sounded to Sam like a singularly vulgar laugh.

"Ike Jackson, if you're here, come out, and don't be playing such tricks!" he commanded. "I'll tan you for this when I catch you."

At his command the boy came into sight.

"I didn't mean no harm," he said. "Where's your lantern?"

Sam showed it. Ike picked up a spading fork and, twirling it merrily across his finger, set off toward the brook, with Sam close behind. Bucyrus brought up the rear.

"I thought it was here the treasure was," said Sam. "Else why did you say to meet here?"

"'Tain't very far," Ike explained.

The Tupper farm includes a "gore," inserted in colonial days when the land was allotted, which runs up and down both sides of Roaring Brook for some distance. It was in the direction of the gore that Ike led Sam.

Presently they reached the stream, which justified its name by the noise it made, and followed it up a short way. It was beginning to dawn on Sam that he had gone about as far as safety permitted when Ike came to a halt.

"Here we are," he said, turning around.

Sam took a survey of his surroundings. It was an eery spot at midnight, with the brook rushing mysteriously between high banks on either side and the moonlight breaking through a sparse growth of scrub firs high overhead. The members of the expedition were at the bottom of the gorge, almost at the water's edge, and here Roaring Brook had excavated its deepest bed.

It came to Sam with a shock that they were at the ill-omened Devil's Hole, the very place where, his grandfather told him, the Oxville witch had been accustomed to foregather with her familiar.

The dangers of the situation multiplied themselves in his mind. Perhaps, thought he, Ike Jackson had led him here to murder him, and the spading fork was brought along for the purpose of digging his grave. His nerves already on edge, this effort of the imagination made his flesh crawl, and his tremors were increased by a loud cry, several times repeated, from a dark spot in the bank above them. Sam's teeth began to chatter.

"Pshaw! It's nothing but an old

hoot-owl," said Ike cheerfully, twirling his spade.

"I'm watching you, Ike Jackson," Sam contrived to say in trembling tones. "If you don't walk straight, I'm just going to make you sorry the longest day you live."

"I wouldn't fool you, Mr. Tupper," the boy replied with eagerness. "See—here's the place."

He pointed to a black opening in the side of the bank.

It was the mouth of a shallow cave well known to every boy in Oxville who resorted to this place to swim. At the information that they had arrived Sam's spirits rose a little, for this was beyond question the likeliest spot in the neighborhood for hidden treasure. But he thought best to maintain his pose of incredulity.

"There ain't nothing in there, Ike Jackson, and you know it," he protested. "I've been in there hundreds of times when I was a little shaver, no larger than what you are now, and I know every inch of it. I'm going home to bed, and to-morrow I'll tell Uncle Peter on you."

"Aw, come on, Mr. Tupper!" the boy urged. "I wouldn't bring you all this way for nothing. Honest, there's something here."

"Well, you've got to show it to me before I'll believe it," said Sam grudgingly.

"You just follow me and I will," Ike promised. "I'll go first, and then you light the lantern and come along."

Dragging the spading fork, he dropped to his knees and began to crawl into the black entrance. Bucyrus, who had been standing patiently by all this time, spied him before he had wormed his way out of sight.

On the seat of Ike's overalls was a patch from one of Mrs. Jackson's old aprons, of a lighter color than the rest of the material, and it may have been this that suggested itself to Bucyrus as a miraculously sent target.

In any event, the ram gathered himself together and, before Sam knew what he was doing, charged. There came a muffled howl from the interior of the cave.

"Aw, Mr. Tupper, that ain't fair!" rang out Ike's agonized tones. "I ain't done you no harm."

"Why, Ikey, I didn't do nothing!" Sam shouted back, instantly sympathetic.

"You hit me a kick with your cowhides, that's what you did," accused the hidden voice. "I'll tell Uncle Pete on you."

"I didn't, neither. It was Bucyrus. He saw you first," said Sam.

There was silence for a moment, during which the inhumed boy appeared to be communing with himself. When next he spoke it was to urge Sam to follow with the lantern.

The ram's owner took the precaution of discouraging Bucyrus with stones before bending to the path Ike had chosen, and thus squeezed past the narrow entrance without casualty, though at considerable expense of effort. The door to the cave, which was small for Ike, nearly balked him.

When he was beyond it the cave widened and progress was easier. He could hear Ike scrambling on ahead, and figured that he was almost at the end of the cavern as it used to be in his boyhood days. He held the lantern up and tried to pierce the gloom.

The rays of light struck the blank end of the cave and showed it empty. Ike had vanished. On the instant Sam's former fears revived.

The boy was lurking somewhere, perhaps close at hand, ready to finish him with the spading-fork. In the pain of this conviction Sam gave a yell of fright.

"What's the matter? Did you get a stone-bruise on your knee?" inquired Ike's voice at his right.

Sam turned and saw an opening which certainly had never existed in his own boyhood. He explained feebly that he had stepped on his hand, not an impossible feat considering the contortions passage of the cave entailed,

and, going through the unexpected doorway, found himself in a fairly large chamber.

"I swan to man!" he exclaimed. "I never saw this place before."

"I found it all myself," Ike explained with becoming modesty. "They don't any of the other boys know about it. The door was all chocked up with stones and things."

He took the lantern from Sam's feeble grasp and set it on the floor in front of the opening.

"If I should show you something real valuable, you wouldn't give that spruce to Dr. Foster, would you, Mr. Tupper?" he inquired in wheedling tones.

"Call me Sam, Ike," the farmer urged. "About that spruce, now—I don't know but what I'd do as you ask if you should show me something real good."

"Won't you promise?" urged Ike.

"No, I ain't going to make any promises. I told you that before. Just you get busy now and show me what you've found."

Ike, while disappointed, did as he was told. He attacked the earth floor of the cavern at the side of the entrance, and, laboring industriously, had soon excavated a hole a foot deep and some three feet square.

"Let me spell you, Ikey," said Sam.

Suiting action to the words, he took the tool and continued the digging.

He had gone down another foot when his fork tines struck something hard. Prodding at it, he realized that it was not stone. It was of an even, unyielding surface; it was—it must be—the treasure.

"I've got it! I've got it!" he yelled and began digging with renewed energy.

In another minute he had loosened the earth enough to scoop it out with his fingers and feel of what he had found.

It was wood fashioned by hand; that much was clear from the square corners. Grubbing with his fingers into the damp mold at one side, he encountered what felt like a padlock of ancient manufacture.

"Here, let me dig; it's my turn now," said Ike, trying to wrest the fork from Sam. But Sam resisted.

"I'll finish this up, Ikey," he said. "It's on my farm, and anyway you're not strong enough."

"No; I want to dig!" cried Ike. "I brought the spading-fork."

Sam's grip on the useful tool tightened and he refused to be coerced.

"Leggo of it, I tell you!" he commanded. "I'm going to finish this job now."

They were like two boys quarreling over possession of a baseball-bat; and victory would have fallen to Sam had not chance intervened. But suddenly, while they were still glaring at one another, there was a clatter, and the lantern Ike had set at the entrance rolled over and went out.

They had just time, looking up quickly before being left in utter darkness, to catch a glimpse of the inquiring face of Bucyrus framed in the hole through which they had entered.

CHAPTER VIII.

SAM'S BARGAIN.

SILENCE enwrapped the partners in this catastrophe. Sam, his suspicions of the benevolent intentions of the boy renewed, clung to the spading-fork with a death-grip, and was relieved when he felt the other releasing his hold.

From the outer darkness came an inquiring "Baa-a-a!"

"Darn that old sheep, anyway!" spoke Ike's voice. "He went and kicked over the lantern."

"You be careful what you say, Ike Jackson," warned Sam. "That's my sheep and this is my farm we're on."

"It didn't break, anyway," returned the boy's voice, more cheerfully. "We'd have heard it if it had. You got a match?"

Holding the spading-fork *couchant* with his right hand, Sam groped through his pockets with the other and produced a sulfur-dipped match.

"Take care it don't go out. It's the only one I got," he said.

Ike, heeding the request, struck the match on his overalls and carefully guarded the slender blue flame which sprang into existence.

Still cautious, he sank to his knees and groped round for the lantern. In the dim illumination of the brimstone his sinister features were more than ordinarily awesome.

"Be careful or you'll have the whole place afire!" cried Sam, observing that he was holding the match close to the floor of the cavern.

He spoke too late. The vapors from the spilled kerosene had already caught and were playing fitfully back and forth across the soaked earth, like heat-lightning, until at length they focused on a little pool of the illuminant which had collected in a cuplike depression and sprang up more brightly.

From this nucleus the fire spread in every direction. It gave out a heat which scorched Sam's sunburnt face, and its odor was suffocating.

"I told you you'd do that!" cried Sam. "Right in the door, too. Now, how are we going to get out?"

But this, it appeared, was an easy one for Ike. He had found the lantern, unscrewed the cap of the reservoir, and with the utmost nonchalance, while Sam looked on in horror, scooped up in his bare palm as much of the still blazing kerosene as remained unburned at the bottom of the little pool and let it dribble into the lantern.

Then, kneeling in the very midst of the flame-spread area, he held the lantern wick where it could ignite.

"You'll catch fire!" screamed Sam. "You'll be burned to death! Look out there!" as the fire lighted on a spot of fresh fuel and shot up higher.

"Pshaw, that's nothing! I've got fire insurance," Ike returned composedly. "Now I'll put them out."

He did this by lying down and rolling to and fro on the ground, while Sam looked on, frozen with horror. The boy seemed actually to revel in the flames which played round him, licking his face and hands and body caressingly. In a couple of minutes the cave was again reduced for light to the lantern's feeble glow.

"Suffering cats and jumping toads!" Sam murmured, the cold perspiration standing out on his face. "If that don't beat all Tunket!"

The boy, apparently unconscious that he had accomplished anything extraordinary, rose to his feet and turned toward Sam.

"Go ahead and dig if you want to," he said. "I don't care."

At a loss for comment in the presence of a sight so terrible, Sam returned to the task of uncovering the treasure-chest.

But his spade stopped in mid air.

"Where's the hole?" he demanded. "I can't find the hole."

"Ain't it right there?" Ike asked.

"No, it— Say, bring the lantern over here, can't you? I want to see."

Ike obediently did as he was told.

Even with the lantern's aid Sam was unable to find the spot where he had been digging. He looked this way and that, covering finally the entire floor of the subterranean chamber, without lighting on what he was looking for.

He turned suspiciously to Ike once more.

"Say, where's that hole?" he asked. "You're playing tricks on me to-night, and now you've gone and swiped that hole when I was looking the other way. What have you done with it?"

"I ain't done nothing—honest, I ain't," the boy whimpered. "Couldn't you see me all the time? How do I know where the old hole is?"

Sam renewed his search. The floor of the cave showed no evidence that it had ever been disturbed. He tried it here and there with the tines of the fork; it was all equally hard, damp, and moldy. At length he gave it up.

"I can't make head or tail to it," he exclaimed, "and I'm going home! You can stay here until milking-time if you like to, but I've got to catch some sleep. Remember me to Uncle Peter."

He turned to leave, greatly disgusted, but Ike caught him by the strap of his suspenders and said plaintively:

"Say, Mr. Tupper, you ain't going to give that spruce timber for a new church, are you?"

"I don't see why I shouldn't, 's long as this business has frazzled out the way it has," Sam returned. "If we could have found that box I might have been willing to say something else."

"I'll do anything you want me to do if you won't," said the boy.

"Such as what? If you're no better at other things than you are at getting hidden treasure, you couldn't do much."

"It wasn't my fault that the light went out. It was that darned old sheep's."

"What became of the hole, then, I'd like to know?" Sam demanded.

"I don't know. Hidden treasure's queer that way. Sometimes the only way to get it is by not saying a word, and if you say only but one it just disappears."

"That's so," Sam admitted, remembering to have heard of such phenomena.

"P'rhaps you had something on you, like a Bible or a prayer-book, that worked wrong for us."

"I haven't got anything like that," Sam declared. "There isn't anything in my pockets except my jack-knife and—"

He drew forth a scrap of printed paper from the vicinity of his hip. It was a leaf from the *Sunday-School Advocate*, enclosing some flowering beans Wes's wife had sent over to Huldah for planting, which had lain so long forgotten in his overalls that Sam was ashamed to deliver them. "By gravy, I forgot about that!"

"Then, that's what made the trouble—that and Bucyrus," Ike explained. "It's no good looking any more to-night. But I can do lots more things besides find treasure if you won't give that spruce."

"You pester me to death about that spruce," said Sam. "Just tell me what you can do."

"Why—why—anything. You try," said the boy.

"I'll think it over and let you know in a week," Sam gave in suddenly.

He was less impressed with Ike's claims of power than with the exhibition he had witnessed to-night. A boy who could endure fire that way might be useful in many directions, such as scalding hogs or burning over pastures. He almost envied Uncle Peter possession of him until he remembered that Huldah never could have borne to have him round the house.

"Now I'm going out first, and I'll take the spading-fork so you won't have to bother."

He negotiated the exit successfully, except that his broad shoulders stuck for a couple of minutes at the outer opening; and with his arms pinned to his sides he was helpless to ward off Bucyrus, who licked his face all over twice, finding it of a pleasant, salty flavor. The ram's tongue was so clammy that Sam was almost provoked to profanity.

He got free at last, and, rejoiced to be under the open sky again, made quick work of the trip home, and slid into bed without disturbing his still slumbering wife.

Pondering what had befallen him during the next two days, he could no longer doubt that Ike Jackson, the nameless foundling, was possessed of supernatural powers, and had seen fit because of interest in the proposed new church to manifest them in his direction. Whence the powers sprang, who could say?

Of far greater importance, as Sam saw it, was that they should be diverted into channels profitable to him. Working in the broad daylight at prosaic farm duties, he realized how groundless had been his fears on the

night of the treasure-hunt. When all was said it was only Uncle Peter's town charge, Ike, offering to bargain with him.

Sam felt that it was the first piece of real good luck he had enjoyed since the affair of the magical bath-tub, and he proposed to make the most of it. He flattered himself that there were few in the whole county who could get ahead of him in a matter of trade. Certainly, Ike Jackson was not to be included among those doubtful few.

He might not have spoken of the matter to Huldah at all had it not been for a sniggling and persistent fear that by accepting Ike's offer he would be letting himself in for something he could not foresee. If this were so, he wanted to be in a position to throw the responsibility on his wife, like any other man. So he opened up the subject as they sat on the piazza after supper.

"Sam, I should think you were old enough to get sensible," remarked Huldah to his story of the treasure-hunt. "Trapesing round the country by moonlight with a half-grown little boy! I declare, it puts me out of patience!"

There was a twinkle in her eyes, however, which belied her words, for Sam's boyishness and credulity were part of the charm he held for her.

"But I tell you there was a treasure-chest," Sam insisted. "And we'd have had it only for Bucyrus spilling the lantern."

"Yes, and there was a magical bath-tub, only you never could make me believe it," she replied.

"Well," her husband sighed, appreciating that he was face to face with hard common sense, "do you think I'd better do as Ike says?"

"Make him show you, Sam," his wife advised. "If he can do the things you've been telling me he could he can do anything."

"And tell the parson he can't have the spruce?"

"What time of year is this to be cutting spruce-timber, anyway?" she answered. "I should think that could wait a while, with everybody in Oxville busy planting crops, and then comes haying, and after that harvesting and such and making cider, and then winter wheat and rye to be sowed before there's any let-up for lumbering."

"That's so, Huldah," agreed her spouse.

"Now, what I would say is, make Ike earn everything you give him. If he's such a wonder as you tell, put him to clearing the ten-acre lot of stumps and draining the crick meadow, or something useful like that. Make him help round the farm-work. You could afford to buy his time off Uncle Peter if he's so wonderful."

"And have him live here, Huldah?" asked Sam, almost eagerly.

"Land, I wouldn't have the imp in the house!" she declared. "Mrs. Jackson's cooking's good enough for him yet a while, I guess."

"That's one thing she could do—cook," said Sam, with a reminiscent smack of the lips.

"It's too bad you didn't marry Mrs. Jackson and have done with it before ever Uncle Peter came home," his wife replied dryly. "But, Sam, if this Ike Jackson knows as much as he claims—"

"Well?"

"Why don't you get him to catch the fellow that set the old church afire? Now, that would be something usefuller than ramming round over the hills after midnight."

"By cricky, Huldah, I'll do it!" cried Sam, bringing his fist down with a thump on the arm of his chair. "I hadn't thought of it. You're a cute one, Huldah."

She warded off his attempted caress with a pretense of coyness.

"Now, Sam, don't get foolish," she protested.

Ike remained invisible to dwellers on the Tupper farm during the entire week following the adventure at

Devil's Hole, and Sam, oddly enough, became conscious that his absence created a void. Always hitherto the farmer had viewed his arrival with suspicion and his departure with relief, but now he felt that he could have welcomed a visit.

It would never do, however, to press the issue. His Yankee instinct told him he could bargain better if he left the approach to the other fellow. His only overture, therefore, was to ask Uncle Peter, whom he met casually in Ben Gray's store, whether Ike had recovered from the wounds the birdshot had inflicted.

"He can set down on a soft cushion now," returned Mr. Jackson gruffly. "It's no thanks to you that he ain't crippled for life."

Sam refrained from answering this sally. He had reason for believing that Ike was emphasizing his injuries for the purpose of escaping his regular farm chores.

On the evening of the seventh day, as Sam was propped against the well-curb in a favorite posture, idly chewing a straw and meditating on nothing in particular, he was brought to his senses by the sharp hiss of a snake, such as had startled him a week before. Being prepared for anything now, he said softly without looking around:

"That you, Ikey?"

"Yes, it's me. Come out behind the barn," replied Ike's hoarse whisper.

Sam pulled himself together and deliberately, without show of eagerness, strolled in the direction ordered. His heart beat rapidly from his consciousness of an unusual opportunity, but he held himself in check. Indifference was to be his pose.

"Well, what's the trouble?" he asked when he came face to face with the boy in the half light.

"Say, you ain't forgot what we were saying about that spruce-timber, have you, Mr. Tupper?" asked the lad.

His tones were subdued, but his manner indicated to Sam's experienced eye the importance he attached to the question.

"Oh, that?" the farmer said. "Why, I thought I told you, Ikey, that I'd the same as decided to give it to Dr. Foster."

"Say, Mr. Tupper, don't you do it!" Ike cried. "I told you I would make it worth your while not to. I'll do anything you want me to if you won't."

"Talk is cheap, Ikey," said Sam, "but doing's a horse of another color. You don't look real strong and healthy to me, and I don't believe you'd be much use around a farm. Still—" He left a loophole.

"I can do more than anybody round here," the boy declared.

"Could you—now, could you drain my crick meadow, for instance?" Sam asked incredulously.

"Pshaw! that's easy. It wouldn't take me long."

"Could you clear the stumps out of the hill pasture?"

"That's easier enough sight than draining meadows," the lad asserted.

"What about getting the fellow that set fire to the old church locked up? That wouldn't be such pie for you—would it, Ikey?"

"I'll do it if you won't give that spruce," Ikey promised.

"Now, I'll tell you what I will do, Ike Jackson," said Sam, his manner changing. "You've been making a lot of tall talk about what you could do. I had about made up my mind to do as Dr. Foster wants me to; but I'll put him off if you promise to work for me this summer and do the things I want done, and first off you're to find out who set the church afire. About your time, I'll arrange that with Uncle Pete. Is that satisfactory?"

"And you won't give Dr. Foster the spruce?" the boy demanded.

"I can put him off," said Sam cautiously, remembering that, as Huldah said, spring was a poor time for cutting lumber, anyway.

"Then I'll do it, Mr. Tupper," the boy cried. "Here's my hand on the bargain."

Sam accepted the outstretched paw, but quickly dropped it and blew on his own palm.

"My, how hot your flesh is, Ikey!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER IX.

A SLOTHFUL SERVANT.

For some weeks affairs at the Tupper farm pursued the even tenor of their ways, and the peace of life in Oxville remained undisturbed. The only change in relationships was that resulting from the addition of Ike Jackson to Sam's forces.

When Sam had approached his Uncle Peter with a proposal to buy the boy's time, Mr. Jackson had hardly been able to conceal his surprise. Ike's reputation in the neighborhood for industry and promise along lines of agricultural endeavor was so deservedly bad that his guardian would have looked for an outburst of merry laughter from his wife as soon as for a genuine offer for the orphan's services.

By the exercise of Herculean effort, however, he managed to hide his true feelings under a cloak of pretended affection for the lad.

"I don't doubt but what you mean well, Sam," said he, "but it would be like cutting off an arm to lose Ike. He's such a help round the place, and then Mis' Jackson sets a store by him."

"Well, 'tain't as if you were never going to see him again, Uncle Pete," Sam encouraged him. "Any time Mis' Jackson feels as if she couldn't get along another minute without a visit, she can run over, and he can come home nights to sleep. The fact is, we ain't got room to sleep him at our house, anyway, but I guess we can manage to eat him there."

"All three meals?" asked Uncle Peter.

"Yes, and four if he wants them. I should like him to get over before breakfast, anyway; and he wouldn't get his chores done till after suppertime."

"What do you want him for, anyway, Sam?" Uncle Peter demanded, unmasking his curiosity.

"Why—well, the truth is," Sam replied, thinking quickly, "I got to have more help on the place, what with summer here and all, and Wes can't do as much as he used to since he got to be jailer."

"I shouldn't think that would take him much time," Uncle Pete rejoined with a hint of suspicion in his voice. "There's hardly ever any one in jail. I heard there was some talk of closing it up for good 'nless they got a prisoner before long. Wes wouldn't lose much if they did, seeing's how he only gets board-money when he has some one to look after."

"He's had two tramps in there in only the short time since he's been jailer," Sam rejoined cheerfully. "Besides, Wes 'lows a good deal on holding public office. Some men are that way.

"But the jail has to be kept swept out whether or not there's any one there, and on top of that since Wes got married he has his own garden to make and—well, a married man has a good deal more use for his time than a single man."

"That's so," Uncle Pete sighed sympathetically. "Now, about Ike." He felt that he had not reached the bottom of Sam's desire for the lad, and an old doubt revived. "Look here, Sam—you ain't aiming to get the keep of him from the town yourself, are you?"

"Sho, Uncle Pete, you know I wouldn't do anything like that," his nephew protested.

"Well, I dunno. After you pasting him full of birdshot I kind of thought— But how much'll you give? He's quite a good deal of use to me with only Bill Moloney to help round

the farm, and him drinking himself full whenever he can get the stuff."

Only to himself would he admit that Bill Moloney, the town's ne'er-do-well, would probably yield a better return on the investment with Ike out of the way than with the boy hanging round and leading the other astray, as actually happened. The orphan exerted a singular and unprofitable fascination over Bill. Uncle Peter knew, to be sure, that Sam also knew this, but hoped he would forget it until the bargain was made.

Sam, intent on smothering his eagerness, did forget it, as well as other factors which should have entered into the dealing, with the result that after another hour of discussion, during which Uncle Peter advanced the most improbable arguments, all pointing toward his affection for and admiration of Ike, an arrangement was entered into.

"I know you're getting the best of me, Sam," Mr. Jackson complained when it was over. "But, then, I never was any good at trading. A baby could cheat the eye-teeth out of me."

Sam reflected that the infant who did that would deserve a monument in the public square, for he retained enough common sense to realize that on the face of the returns he had been atrociously bested. Only in case Ike possessed the abnormal powers of which Sam suspected him, and could be induced to manifest them in profitable ways, would his judgment be vindicated.

But when the boy presented himself for instruction in his duties Sam's heart sank. The glamour of midnight expeditions and inexplicable manifestations was lacking in the before-breakfast atmosphere of the Tupper farm. Ike looked like only a common, if extraordinarily ugly, little boy, obviously worth far less than the two dollars a week and "eat him" with which his services were purchased.

Under this cloud of doubt, his employer set Ike at tasks suited to boys of his tender years. As the days went by Sam became more and more deeply impressed with the realization that Uncle Peter had handed him a lemon. For Ike was all things a farm-boy should not be—unreliable, tricky, careless, and truant.

One day Sam went out to look at an acre sown to millet. In a way this was the first fruit of Ike's tenancy of office, for the earliest task Sam had set him had been to look over the seed destined for this field, sorting the good from the bad.

Now the crop was just appearing above the ground. Sam dropped to his knees to examine the growth.

"I vum!" he exclaimed to himself. "That ain't millet!"

Instead of the straight spikes of the crop to which the field had been dedicated, he saw the tender first leaves of pigweed, wild mustard, and, worst of all, that bane of farmers known as devil's paint-brush. Thinking that he had begun his examination in an unfortunate spot, he moved to another.

The same condition revealed itself. With his life's training in the warfare on weeds, he was able to pick out every noxious vegetable growth peculiar to the locality, and among them all not a spear of millet. He jumped to his feet, furious, and went in search of Wes Smithers.

"Wes," he shouted, before he was close enough to be heard in ordinary tones, "did you sow the millet?"

"Why, no," Wes returned. "Ike wasn't doing anything, so I let him have the sowing of it as long as it was all ready. Why?"

"Nothing, except that there ain't a spear of millet in the whole field. But there's pigweed enough to feed the stock-yards!" raged Sam. "I'm going to look for that young whelp."

He had left his chore-boy with a file and instructions to smooth down the rough edges of the mowing machine's cutting blades, so as to have it ready against the arrival of haying time. He found the machine exactly

where he had left it, under the open-faced shed which accommodated odds and ends of wheeled paraphernalia. Ike was elsewhere.

His anger still high, Sam set out to find him. Huldah and Deborah, at work in the kitchen, had seen nothing of the boy. Sam turned his steps toward the barn.

A noise from the feed-room, whose door stood ajar, attracted his attention. He stepped thither softly and peeked in.

On an upturned peck measure in his line of vision sat the truant, apparently engaged in a solitary game popular at rural parties known as "twirl the platter." He was playing it with odds and ends of tinware collected from the poultry-yard and other places. Some half-dozen battered utensils were scattered over the floor.

As Sam looked he saw the boy take a dented and reckless-looking pie-tin and, with a dexterous twist of his fingers, send it rolling across the floor of the feed-room, its uneven rim leaving a trail in the mealy dust which lay heavy on everything. The plate made a circle of the place and, its momentum giving out, ended its tour almost in front of Ike, who was watching it intently. It wabbled weakly and came to rest, right side up.

Ike stared at it as if the tin had forgotten part of the mission on which he had started it. For a couple of seconds the superannuated utensil lay inert, and then, under Sam's astonished gaze, raised itself briskly, without external aid, balanced for an instant on its edge, and flopped over, the other side up.

At this spectacle the observer's eyes grew as large as saucers. When the commonplace things of life indulge in eccentricities it is always perplexing. The unusual in unfamiliar objects, on the other hand, always finds us receptive.

A deeper tin vessel, sped on a circuit of the room, performed exactly the same trick, coming to a standstill beside the pie-tin and turning upside down, as the other had done. Then a brand-new milk-pail was sent on its round, handle clattering.

The sight of this desecration of his property revived Sam's wrath against the boy. He pushed open the door and strode in.

"Ike Jackson," he began, "what are you—"

He stopped short, realizing that they were not alone. The third occupant of the room was the largest black cat Sam had ever seen, which had been out of sight from where he stood, but now turned and glared a menace at him. The cat's tail, as Sam was prepared to state later, was larger round than a stick of cordwood.

"He won't hurt you," said Ike reassuringly.

He raised his finger, pointed at the cat, and said a few words unintelligible to Sam.

Evidently they were an order; for as Sam stood on guard, ready for a hasty exit should the cat approach, the animal turned and sprang straight at the closed window.

"Here, you!" yelled Sam, prepared for the sound of broken glass.

He had no time to say more before the cat had vanished straight through the closed window, whose panes remained intact.

Forgetting his errand, Sam went to see what had happened. He could hardly believe his eyes when he discovered that the window was unbroken and closed as tight as ever. So far as he knew, indeed, it had never been opened since the barn was built.

"What were you saying, Mr. Tupper?" Ike asked politely.

"I was saying— What was I saying?" Sam replied in bewilderment. "I was going to say, Ike Jackson, that I don't think you're any good round this farm, and you might as well go now as any other time. That's what I came to say."

"Why, what've I done now, Mr. Tupper?" Ike asked whimperingly. "Ain't I always done the best I can? Have I complained of my food? Ain't

I just a little orphan boy without no father or mother, and no friend at all but just you?"

To Sam's discomfort he began to cry.

The farmer hardened his heart.

"Now see here, Ikey," he said, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, but it's kind of coming over me that you're wasting your talents on this farm. When I bought your time off Uncle Pete I thought you might be some use to me. And what use you been?

"You set out to sow millet, and up comes pigweed and witch-grass, to say nothing of devil's paint-brush, which is worse'n all. I set you to sharpening the mowing machines, and here you are rolling plates and such foolishness. Where'd that cat come from?" he demanded, changing the subject abruptly.

"Cat? I ain't seen any cat," Ike declared. "There wa'n't nobody here but just me and another little boy that went out when you come. Was there a cat, too?" He looked round innocently.

Sam, perceiving small profit in pursuing that line of inquiry, switched back again.

"Well, all I got to say is that you and I might just as well get a divorce now as any time. I'll pay Uncle Pete up to Saturday night, but I want you to go now."

"And you'll give that spruce to Dr. Foster?" Ike sniveled, rubbing his eyes with dirty fists.

"Of course I will. Now, if you'd been any good—"

"Aw, you didn't give me no chance! You didn't tell me anything to do!" the boy whined.

"You said you could drain the crick meadow if I wanted you to," Sam accused, "but you haven't done it."

"I can. I'll have it all drained by to-morrow morning," Ike declared eagerly, "if only you won't help to have a new church here."

"By to-morrow morning? Now I know you're making a sucker out of me," Sam retorted.

Draining the creek meadow was a week's job for five men, according to his estimate—and he had been gulled long enough.

"I can. Honest I can," Ike whined. "Just you wait and see."

The farmer reflected. It was foolishness, of course, and the boy was probably only playing for delay in order to accomplish some unworthy plan. Yet, as Sam looked at him, a recollection of the high hopes with which he had "bought his time" returned, with a memory of some unusual happenings in which the lad had already figured.

Ike hung on his look. There was something pitiful about the lad which stirred Sam's sympathies and influenced his decision. After all, silly as was his claim of power to drain the creek meadow overnight, he might as well put it to the test and on its nonfulfilment carry out his threat.

"I'll give you one more chance, Ike Jackson," said he finally. "I'm a dumb fool for doing it, but here's my last word. You pick up these pans and pails and put them where they belong. Then you take the mattock and shovel and get to work on that crick meadow.

"If I see that you've worked faithfully by this time to-morrow, I'll think again about what I said. But if you haven't, out you go, and Dr. Foster gets that spruce. Now, you know what I mean."

Muttering to himself, Ike picked up the dishes with which he had been playing, put them in their proper places under Sam's warning gaze, and started toward the tool-house.

CHAPTER X.

THE SERVANT MAKES GOOD.

DURING the remainder of the day Sam maintained an intermittent supervision of his chore-boy's activities. His own work forbade constant personal direction, even if the lad's services were worth the necessary time,

which they were not. For the business of the farm was now in full swing, and Sam and Wes both had all they could do to keep up with it.

He took occasion now and again, however, to run to a point whence he could see the creek meadow and learn whether Ike were still at the post of duty.

To his considerable surprise each time he found the boy toiling away as if his very life depended on the continuity of his efforts. It was so unusual a phenomenon that Sam hardly credited his own senses.

After dinner, to which Ike came reluctantly, like one loath to leave a congenial task, Sam went out to inspect his work. Quite as he had expected, hardly an impression had been made on the face of the meadow.

"That's all right, Ikey," he said reassuringly. "It's tough digging, but I won't complain as long as you're doing the best you know how. Don't sweat yourself too hard. I guess you won't quite get it all done by to-morrow, hey?"

"I guess I can, all right, Mr. Tupper," the lad returned pluckily. "Getting started's hardest."

"Probably that's so," Sam agreed. "I guess we can give you another day or so to finish up in, though."

He went about his own work, marveling at the persistence with which the lad clung to his delusion of finishing a week's task for five men within twenty-four hours.

Ike looked pale and spent when he came in to supper, which was quite to be expected, considering that, as far as his employer knew, he had never done a real day's work before in his whole life. But physical depletion was not likely to work any permanent injury, so Sam said nothing, and after the meal was over, and the usual chores done, saw him start away, as he supposed, for Uncle Peter's house.

"I guess Ike'll sleep sound to-night all right," he told Huldah. "He put in a real day ditching on the crick meadow. I dunno but it's too hard work for him."

"It'll be a good thing for him to get a taste of real work for once," Huldah replied unsympathetically. "I don't know what Mrs. Jackson's thinking of, humoring a boy that's got his own way to make in the world."

It was nearly nine o'clock, and she and Sam were just putting out the cats, winding the clock, and making other final preparations for bed when there came a loud knock at the front door.

"Now, who on earth do you suppose that is at this time o' night?" cried Huldah.

The knock was repeated with more vigor. Not stopping to wonder farther, Huldah undid the fastenings and opened the door. Haloed in the oil-lamp's rays stood Mrs. Jackson.

"Is Ikey here?" she demanded without unnecessary preliminaries.

"Ikey?" Sam repeated over Huldah's shoulder. "Why, he left for home right after supper, Mis' Jackson."

"He did?" The caller began to weep in her quiet, aggravating way. "He ain't come home yet, and I'm scared something's happened to him."

"I should think he was old enough to take care of himself, Mis' Jackson," said Huldah. "What could happen to him in Oxville?"

This practical question, which Huldah repeated, gave Mrs. Jackson a moment's pause. It was true there were very few things that could happen to a boy in Oxville; all the menaces of larger centers were lacking. The unsympathetic attitude toward her own distress, however, forced itself prominently on her notice.

"I must say," she remarked indignantly, "that I should think you might show a little neighborly feeling, specially as Ikey is working his fingers to the bone for you.

"Night after night he comes home and tells me how he has to sweat and slave, and I want to say to you, Sam

Tupper, that I'm going to hold you responsible for anything that has happened to Ike, be it much or be it little. Now I'll go back home and see if the poor dear's got there yet."

After she went, Huldah expressed her opinions of the incident and went straightway to bed. Sam delayed a little on pretext of trifling matters demanding attention. The truth was that Mrs. Jackson's visit had afforded him food for thought.

A half-hour later, tiptoeing softly to the bedroom door, he satisfied himself that his wife was asleep. Many times in his married life it had been a matter for self-congratulation that Huldah was a quick and easy wooer of tired nature's sweet restorer, and to-night was one of them, for Sam had determined to take another look at the creek meadow before turning in.

Whence the impulse came he hardly knew himself. Certainly Ike had not made enough of an impression on the task during the day to warrant any expectation that he would progress rapidly after nightfall, even if his ardor impelled him to labor at unusual hours.

Perhaps it was the earnestness with which he had assured his employer that the undertaking would be accomplished within twenty-four hours. Sam was always credulous of the impossible. Not because of Ike's promise, but because the statement was manifestly absurd did the farmer let himself silently out of the kitchen door and strike down through the garden toward the meadow in question.

Half-way there he stopped short and told himself with emphatic gravity that he was the biggest fool in Oxville. There wasn't a doubt of it. Here he was, a solid citizen who had even been mentioned for selectman, chasing off through the dew at an hour when sensible people were abed—for what? To see whether the idle, irresponsible chore-boy was working overtime? To restore him to Mrs. Jackson's arms and so allay her fears?

Unable to answer, he wavered for a moment and then proceeded on his way.

It was a dark night, but Sam, with intimate knowledge of every foot of the Tupper farm, avoided missteps. Before reaching the meadow fence he had made up his mind that his reason for being abroad at this unusual hour was to learn whether Ike, inspired by misguided zeal and disinclination for religious services, was turning night into day at the task assigned. If this were the case, Sam would gently but firmly point out the error of his policy.

Reaching the meadow, he leaned on the top rail and listened for possible sounds of labor. His first impression was of being quite alone in the night.

This lasted a brief moment. In the next, Sam felt as if he were at the mouth of a very beehive of energetic toil.

To his right he heard a sound—half-sigh, half-whisper, which he was unable to identify with any of the myriad noises of nature with which he was familiar. It was answered by a similar outburst, a little louder if anything, at his left. Then, from far away across the meadow came a low, suppressed cry.

On its heels the noise made by contact of tools with yielding earth assailed the farmer from every quarter. He heard the suck and sough of water-soaked clods lifted from their bed, the dull impact of the mattock on tough roots, a medley of sounds, chorused yet hushed, and sighing whispers everywhere. And as he listened to it all, trying to pierce the mystery with his imagination, he felt his scalp crawl with fear of the unknown.

Clearly enough something out of the common was taking place in this overmoist meadow of his. Something extraordinary—and Ike must be at the bottom of it. He threw one long leg over the top rail, conquering fear with curiosity, and started to investigate for himself.

At the very moment his feet struck the ground he realized the extent of

his indiscretion. Rather, it was forced upon his notice when a chunk of muddy turf struck him violently upon the side of the neck.

"Consarn you, Ike Jackson," he roared, more angry now than frightened, "what are you doing out here at this time of night?"

As if his voice had been a signal, the confusion of soft sounds which up to then had filled his ears, ceased on the instant.

The night fell once more as still as the grave. But from the person to whom his question was addressed there came no answer. A more than natural stillness had succeeded the subdued bustle of a minute before.

For all that Sam felt, even though he could neither see nor hear, that he was surrounded by sentient and antagonistic creatures. As for the piece of turf which had struck him, he was certain it had been hurled by his chore-boy. He raised his voice again.

"Ike, I want you," he called. "Mis' Jackson has been over to get you."

This time he did receive a reply, although a quite different one from what he had expected. It came in the shape of a second missile, which struck him on the other side of the neck, and, as the farmer knew by the feeling, made both sides match in appearance.

He flattered himself that up to the present moment he had governed his temper pretty well, but this insult rendered him furious. He lost sight of everything except his desire to visit instant punishment on the temerarious wretch who had assaulted him on his own farm.

To carry his passion into execution he made a leap to the left, with outstretched arms.

His effort was fruitless; he grasped nothing more substantial than empty darkness. Stopping short, he heard a derisive chuckle in his rear. He wheeled quickly and sprang toward it.

The laugh came again, this time from farther out in the meadow. Sam jumped thither, shouting as he did so.

"Wait till I get my hands on you, Ike Jackson, and I'll make you laugh out of the other corner of your mouth."

The final word was jolted out of him with great violence as a result of his dropping into a hole where formerly, as he well knew, had been solid earth. He felt his foot sinking into soft, oozy mud, and lost no time in clambering back upon the grass.

"That ain't where Ike was working to-day," he said to himself. "How'd that hole get there, I'd like to know? I wish I had a lantern."

Wishing was unproductive of results, however. Sam stooped and examined with his hands, as well as he could in the darkness, the nature of the pit into which he had fallen.

His investigation told him little. But as he bent over, lost in wonder for a minute, the whisperings and other mysterious noises were renewed round him. Try though he might, he could make nothing of them.

"That darned little cuss!" he reflected. "I'd like to know what sort of trick he's playing on me now."

Imagination proving unequal to the demand, he rose, stretched himself, and decided he might as well go home and get some sleep. One thing was certain—Ike could not steal his meadow. The devil himself couldn't do that.

He started to leave, picking his way cautiously to avoid the pit into which he had fallen. He had taken perhaps a half dozen steps when he felt something brush past him, seemingly moving in the same direction.

Instinctively he reached out, and his fingers grasped a solid body.

He dropped it again with far greater eagerness than he had seized it, the rap across the knuckles he received eliciting a howl of pain. But he had felt the course the other—whether or not it was Ike Jackson he was unable to tell, but thought it was—was pursuing, and started after him, eager to inflict chastisement.

In front he heard hastening footsteps. At the same moment a ball of soft mud, striking him in the ear, put that member temporarily out of commission. On its heels came a shower of projectiles of every description.

Sam sturdily refused to be diverted from his course. Pelted, bruised, and sore, he clung to what he believed to be the heels of one offender, at any rate, ahead of him.

The race held straight across the meadow. The farmer had reached the center of the enclosure when his foot dropped into empty space and he fell heavily, striking his shoulder with such force that he lay stunned.

When he came to his senses dawn was just breaking. The creek meadow lay silent and empty. For a moment he had difficulty in remembering where he was.

With recollection his first thought was of what Huldah would say. He raised himself stiffly to his feet and turned his face toward home. There was still a chance that he could get into bed without disturbing her.

The swiftly spreading light revealed a spectacle which brought him to a standstill.

In the early morning's gray illumination he became aware that somehow overnight the creek meadow had been trenched.

CHAPTER XI.

HULDAH HAS A BAD TURN.

It was some time since Sam had seen Dr. Foster, except at Sunday morning preaching-services. The clergyman's ambition for a new church appeared to have been temporarily forgotten, and under stress of his own labors Sam thought of it seldom. The project was recalled to his memory one evening when Jere Cogswell sauntered over for a chat with Deborah.

"Where's the parson keeping himself nowadays, Jere?" Sam inquired.

The young man laughed lightly.

"Oh, he's making one of his researches," he replied. "Uncle gets started off on an investigation now and then, you know, and forgets everything else. He wouldn't even come to his meals if I didn't make him."

This was so well-known a trait of the elderly clergyman's as to cause Sam no surprise. With merely languid interest he asked:

"What's he looking up this time?"

"He's making a study of the old boy—you know who I mean," said Jere. "Uncle Ahira believes that Satan is on the job here on earth in person, with an army of active young devils to help his business along. He's old-fashioned in his ideas. He's even had me looking up authorities. I learned a dandy incantation from a yellow old book he handed to me. Want to hear it?"

"Oh, never mind now," said Sam hastily, and by way of changing the subject added: "Looks like rain, don't it?"

He would have been hard pressed to explain why he disliked more than formerly to participate in discussions of the powers of darkness, yet such was the case. It fairly made his flesh crawl to hear the name of the devil taken lightly, and serious use of it was almost equally distasteful.

The next day it did turn out rainy. Sam was forced to pass it indoors. He was sitting on a broken-back chair in the main aisle of the barn, flanked by the sweet-scented bays, when his notice was caught by the slender, slightly stooping figure of Dr. Foster approaching under cover of an antique umbrella with whalebone ribs.

"Bet he's coming to talk about that spruce again," thought Sam. "Now, how'll I put him off?"

The minister paused at the kitchen door to ask Huldah regarding Sam's whereabouts, and was directed to where the latter sat.

Sam rose to meet him.

"Excuse my not shaking hands, par-

son," he said. "But I'm all over gudgeon grease and ain't fit."

The clergyman excused him courteously and accepted the broken-backed chair, while Sam routed out a box to enthrone himself upon. His mind was actively revolving reasons for denying his caller's expected request; but, to his temporary relief, Dr. Foster had another matter to talk about.

"I am informed, Samuel," said he, "that Ichabod Jackson has entered your employ?"

"Why—why, I guess so, parson," Sam returned, a little flustered at being called on to alter the trend of his thoughts so quickly.

"And do you find him satisfactory?"

"Well, yes and no," Sam replied. "In some ways he's a likely boy, and then again there are others where I'd just as lief have some one else."

"You are doubtless familiar with Ichabod's history?" said the minister in an interrogative tone.

Sam wondered what was coming.

He realized dimly that Dr. Foster had once before begun a discussion of Ike and had been interrupted.

"Yes—yes, parson," he admitted. "I think I might go so far as to say I know the general metes and bounds, after a manner of speaking, being as how he's grown up right round here, and lived with my relatives lately—at least Peter Jackson's a kind of relative. His father and my—"

Dr. Foster interrupted the threatened ascent of the family tree.

"You are doubtless also aware that he is never seen at divine service?"

"I've never seen him there but once. Uncle Pete tells me he's a great one to read his Bible by himself, though."

"'The devil can quote Scripture to serve his own ends,'" said the clergyman solemnly and looked at Sam with significance.

"What—what do you mean, parson?" asked Sam.

A shiver of apprehension chased up and down his spine.

"It is my belief, Samuel," Dr. Foster replied, still very grave, "that Ichabod Jackson, so called, is one of the emissaries of the evil one incarnated in bodily form for the purpose of thwarting religious ends in Oxville. No—wait a minute and I shall give you my reasons," as Sam started to exclaim.

"You may accept my theory as intended to be taken literally," he went on. "From the earliest times it has been known that angels of darkness mingle with the sons of men and seek by devious means to lead them astray. They assume many forms, and their powers transcend our finite human imagination.

"They allure by false promises, reward their proselytes with temporal benefits which must be paid for by eternal damnation, and their name is legion. I am convinced that Ichabod Jackson is one of that numerous army."

Sam's jaws dropped, his eyes bulged, and he drew in a long, shuddering breath at this astonishing indictment of his Uncle Peter's ward and his own chore-boy.

Dr. Foster was a man to be taken seriously. Moreover, the statement crystalized vague suspicions which had been developing in the farmer's mind. He managed to gasp:

"But, say, parson, people don't believe such things as that nowadays."

"The worse for them that they do not," the clergyman returned. "My own judgment has been held in suspense until I could delve into the authorities.

"Now that I have investigated painstakingly and thoroughly, my conclusion is definite. Your story of the black dog which chased the sheep gave me the clue. Do you remember what you were doing when you learned that your flock was threatened?"

"Why, we—you and I—were talking about that spruce on the Higley lot," said Sam, the inference dawning on him.

"And you shot at a dog and struck Ichabod Jackson."

"By mighty, parson, that's so," Sam admitted with growing conviction. "And I kind of thought at the time that they might be the same critter—kind of half thought of it, you know, like a fellow thinks when he hears a good sermon, that he'll put a dollar in the contribution-plate, without believing it any of the time. But, sho, parson—Ike Jackson! He's so queer that nobody round here thinks he's more than half bright."

"Such are Satan's wiles," declared Dr. Foster. "I came to give you warning, Samuel, that you might guard against falling into the pit."

"What—what's that, parson?" Sam asked, feeling cold all over.

"That you may not be entrapped to your eternal damnation. He who strikes palms with the hosts of darkness is in peril of hell-fire. Good morning, Samuel."

The farmer was so engrossed with reflections on what Dr. Foster had told him, that he forgot to answer.

"He who strikes palms with the hosts of darkness"—and he had shaken hands with Ike on their bargain.

Remembering distinctly how hot the other's flesh had been, he looked now at his own palm to learn whether the seal of Satan had been imprinted there. It was a great relief to find it had not.

"The little devil!" he exclaimed to himself when he had grown somewhat calmer. "And me half-suspecting it all the time, but too dumb to see through him. Wes'll think that's a mighty good joke on me."

This was in the earlier moments.

The longer he reflected the less a joke the situation appeared.

Unpalatable memories of what the clergyman had said insisted on obtruding themselves. Such stock phrases as "hell-fire," "eternal punishment," and "the torments of the damned" cropped up.

"I certainly shook hands with him," he admitted. "And hot—by gravy, he was hotter than a new-boiled egg. And me thinking he probably had a fever."

Curiously the humorous side of the predicament burst through his most serious meditations.

"Of course he don't want any church in Oxville," he said. "It's just pie for him to split up the congregation. First off, he snares Sam Tupper. Then he'll get Wes and probably Uncle Pete and Mis' Jackson. It would be funny to see St. Peter reading Mis' Jackson the time-table to the hot place. My, but there'll be a b'iling of Oxville folks there if Ike has his way! Just like old-home week," and he snickered outright.

Then he turned grave again and pondered how he could make his escape from the tightening noose, and how, if he were unable to escape at all, he could make the most of his bargain. He had reached this point when Ike, who had failed to report for duty at the appointed hour that morning, entered the barn.

Sam looked at him with fresh interest mixed with some severity.

"What time is this to be getting to work?" he demanded as the boy stood before him in evident embarrassment. "I ain't going to tell you many times more that work on this farm begins at five o'clock in the morning for you."

"It's raining," Ike excused himself.

"Well, what of it? It's got to rain sometimes, or we wouldn't get any crops," Sam rejoined.

"I—I sort of overslept myself this morning," said Ike apologetically. "Mis' Jackson didn't call me."

"It's my belief you were up to some deviltry last night that kept you out too late," Sam accused. "Now you've got to flax around pretty lively to catch up: that's all I got to say."

He wondered at his own temerity in thus addressing one of Satan's chosen band, but the idea had come to him, coincidentally with Ike's arrival, that the only way to get even partially square with his bargain was to demand the maximum amount of work from the boy. Thus, when the final settlement came, he would at least leave Huldah

an estate worth having. The thought that Ike might enroll her in his society of lost souls from Oxville never for an instant occurred to him.

"What do you want me to do first, Mr. Tupper?" asked Ike.

Sam looked round for a task worthy of the boy's powers. Wes had performed all of the other's chores that morning, and now was nailing some building paper on the inside of the hen-houses. Turning his eyes in that direction, Sam's glance lighted on the corn-crib, nearly empty and ready for the new crop. It gave him an idea.

"See that corn-crib?" he said, pointing.

The boy nodded.

"Well, I've been meaning to move that about twenty feet nearer the barn before I filled her up again. Suppose you get to work on it, and if you finish before dinner I will find something else for you to keep busy at."

Ike stared at his employer with the air of one who doubts his own hearing.

"Well, what're you waiting for?" Sam cried.

"A little boy like me move that there corn-crib, Mr. Tupper?" Ike exclaimed.

"You heard what I said, and I want it done lively, too."

Ike caved.

"P'r'aps I could do it, but I dunno as I could move it quite so quick," he said. "Seems to me I can 'most always work better at night. Now if you'll wait till to-night—"

"Wait for what?" Sam roared in his best *Simon Legree* manner. "What's the matter with doing it now?"

"Only I can work better at night," Ike explained.

"You do it right away, and if you don't get it moved before dinner-time—"

The farmer left his sentence unfinished, but his manner suggested spruce for a church.

While trying to appear wholly at his ease he was vividly conscious of the instability of his position. Suppose the boy should refuse? Suppose he should summon supernatural powers to blast him where he stood? He waited breathlessly for the next move.

For a half-minute the young devil, as Sam now thought of him, stood glaring at his employer, with fingers working nervously. Then, to the other's relief, he replied:

"All right, Mr. Tupper."

Sam, feeling a little giddy, sank back to his job of harness mending. Having set the stint, he was content to permit Ike to carry it out in his own way.

Observing Ike's actions from his seat in the barn door, he was nevertheless surprised to see the businesslike way in which the boy set about the task assigned—surprised and a little disappointed. For he proceeded to the preliminaries of the work in hand in as matter-of-fact a fashion as any agricultural farmer would have employed.

From the tool-house he procured the ten-foot pole and ditching-shovel. He used the former to mark places for the posts which supported the crib, and with the other he dug the holes. Any boy, Sam thought, might have done as much.

It was nearing the dinner hour when the last shovelful of dirt was lifted from the fourth hole, and Sam was thinking to himself that in the interests of discipline he would have to penalize Ike for failure to finish within the allotted time. He had reckoned without taking account of the lad's powers.

For now, having made all ready, Ike crawled underneath the corn-crib.

Sam, getting down on his hands and knees so that he could see what was going on, was disquieted to note that he was not alone. Occupying with him the constricted shelter he had chosen was the big black cat he had met once before, to his vivid memory.

"Got tired of the job, Ike?" yelled Sam, concluding that the boy had quit.

The other answered only by his actions. Sam, with his head close to the

barn floor, could see that he was on his hands and knees under the crib. While he watched, Ike arched his back. So at the same moment did the black cat.

The crib groaned and creaked with the pressure which was being exerted against it.

"You'll bust the whole thing!" Sam cried.

He was growing excited.

Not a word answered Ike. His back arched higher, the cat was a tiptoe. And then, posts and all, the crib reared from its resting-place.

Slowly, carefully, so as not to spill his burden, Ike rose to his feet, his hands planted against the floor boards to steady the burden resting on his shoulders. Meantime, the cat kept step with his every motion.

Ike was at the front end of the structure, his familiar spirit at the rear, and now the cat also was on its hind legs, with its paws placed in ludicrous imitation of the lad's.

Sam was breathing hard and muttering strange oaths under his breath.

"I snum!" he ejaculated. "I snum to goodness!"

No four men in the county could have torn the crib from its moorings.

Either Ike had shrunk in dimensions or the cat had swelled. To the observer it seemed that both of these things had happened.

Then, with the rotting ends of the posts clear of the ground, the crib began to move toward its new site.

Sam expected at any moment to see the whole thing topple over, probably to the complete demolition of its motive power.

Nothing of the sort happened.

The moving was almost accomplished when a shriek from the kitchen door drew Sam's attention.

He turned in time to see Huldah, the wife of his bosom, throw up both hands, a dish-towel in one and a freshly washed pie-plate in the other, and sink to the floor.

(To be continued.)

Bothering a Bit about Betty

Donald A. Kahn

I.

YOU know the sort of girl—daddy worth a couple of millions or more, and daughter just enough of an iconoclast to be a good-looking, bad-acting little democrat.

—When Betty got into the newspapers by riding, dressed in a suit of overalls, perched on the hood of a friend's gasoline runabout, father Bodkins didn't give the item a second thought.

But now he had received information that his daughter, this same Betty,

had fallen in love with a promising young clergyman. A more serious matter, this, according to the Wall Street code.

It worried father. He knew that his companions on 'change would joke if his daughter succeeded in presenting him with a clerical son-in-law, and he himself did not relish the idea of having a minister in the family. And, being unacquainted with gentlemen of the cloth, he held them in not very high esteem; he didn't have the heart to wish one of them on his daughter.

He loved Betty, just as did every one that knew her—only, perhaps, better. Consequently, as was his wont in time of trouble, Mr. Bodkins sent for his friend, Pudge Rupert, of the Elite Boxing Academy. The two men went into consultation.

"Pudge," began the worried father, "being the proprietor of an institution purporting to teach the noble and manly art of self-defense, you undoubtedly are acquainted with most of the wild young bloods in town."

Pudge nodded.

"I've sort of lost track of them," explained Mr. Bodkins. "I've been so busy teasing the loose change away from their *paters* that I haven't kept very close tab on the younger generation. My daughter thinks she's fallen in love with a minister. You can see the disgrace in that, Pudge.

"Now, I'm looking for a young fellow with all kinds of zip to him. Lots of pep—heavy on the pep—but there must be a big streak of true decency in him, too. Can you furnish me with the name of such an individual?"

"Freddy Frazer," announced Pudge promptly. "Son of 'Freezeout' Frazer. Young 'un just finished my course in fancy fightin'. Got a fist like a ham; muscle like a donkey-engine; eye like an automatic; nerve like a dentist—an' heart an' brains back of it all, too.

"Only trouble with Freddy is—too much imagination. Ol' man cut him off. Young 'un come to me and ast how was the best way to crack a time-lock. The young fool had his eye on the vault in the First National."

"Is he good looking?" asked Mr. Bodkins, thoroughly interested.

"Too babylike," criticized Pudge. "You know—got them twinkling big blue eyes."

"Son of Freezeout Frazer, eh?" mused Mr. Bodkins. "He married Mable Jackson from down home. The kid comes from good stock, all right. Say, Pudge, I believe he suits. Send him up, will you? Tell him I want to make him a proposition."

Pudge nodded.

"Buy J. C. O. common to-morrow morning—and hold it," suggested Mr. Bodkins. "Don't say that I made you the whisper."

Pudge nodded again.

"Sure not," he promised—and vanished.

II.

"FOURTEENTH floor, if you please," requested Frederick Ellingham Frazer, stepping into the cage and arranging his cream-colored cravat with minute care.

"That's one above the roof," objected the elevator-boy sourly. "Twelve's as high as we go."

"Perfectly satisfactory, if it's the best you can do," sighed Freddy. "And take your time about it."

At floor twelve the car stopped. Freddy transferred a pink carnation from his own coat-lapel to that of the elevator-boy, and then stroked that red-haired individual fondly on the cheek.

The boy had observed the shape of the arm under Freddy's coat-sleeve. So he did nothing more disrespectful than to say "Cheese it!"

"Which way to Mr. Bodkin's office?" asked Freddy. The boy pointed. "I'm much obliged to you, Lilly-of-the-Valley," acknowledged Freddy with mock politeness.

The boy stuck out his tongue and made a marvelous face. Freddy grinned delightedly, turned sadly

away, walked down the spacious hall, and entered a door marked in letters of gold:

DEWITTE J. BODKINS,
Broker.

"I must see his majesty at once, please," he briefly told the pretty girl at the telephone desk.

"What name shall I say?" she asked.

"Oh, J. P. Morgan is as good as any, I guess," replied the unabashed youth carelessly. "You might say that."

Mr. Bodkins, at the other end of the wire, turned pale as he heard the name the girl whispered to him. Then he thought of his appointment with young Frazer, and he grinned.

"Have the young man shown in," he requested the girl.

Having reached the inner sanctum, Freddy took the largest chair the room afforded, and gazed with manifest curiosity at one of the two other men who, beside his own father, could set the big street at playing hide and seek. And DeWitte J. Bodkins gazed with manifest curiosity, and with some enthusiasm, at Frederick Ellingham Frazer.

The older man coughed, and Freddy recovered himself.

"Beautiful day," he remarked. "Rather rainy, though. However, the humidity isn't so noticeable as it would be if the air were damper."

"Mr. Frazer," replied Bodkins, "I understand that you were graduated with honors last June from one of America's most distinguished institutions of learning. Am I correct in my belief?"

For several moments Freddy gazed at the broker. His face had taken on an abused look.

"Now, Mr. Bodkins!" he protested, pouting. "If you sent for me just to rub that in, I must say that I consider your motive most unkind. I didn't come back from New Haven wearing dark glasses. I admitted to my parents and to the gentlemen of the press that the Yale faculty fired me. So now, cut the fatherly talk, if you please, and get down to dollar signs and decimals. That's your specialty. What is it you want done, and what's there in it for me?"

"You are to name your own salary," stated Mr. Bodkins.

"Make it twice that and I'll accept," responded Freddy. "Whom do you want murdered?"

Mr. Bodkins had thought out a plan to divert Betty's attention.

"What I want, young man," he explained, "is for you to give my daughter lessons in painting."

He had reasoned that a young society man must be interested in art.

Freddy jumped at the suggestion, but retrieved himself instantly.

"Why don't you send your daughter to a beauty-shop, like other girls?" he asked. "Home-made-over features are a poor imitation at best. You can always tell when a Jane puts on the rouge herself—it's smeary, and usually she uses too much. It's no use, I tell you, an amateur—"

"No, no!" objected Mr. Bodkins. "You are to give her lessons in art. That's what I want you to give her."

Freddy thought it all over for a moment. Finally he realized just what it was that the broker proposed he should do.

"Oh, art-painting! I seize your brain germ," he acknowledged. "You want me to teach her how to become an old master!"

"That's the idea," approved the broker.

"When do I commence?" asked Freddy.

"To-morrow morning. I'll make a date with you for eight o'clock."

"I'll be there," agreed the young man, "with bells on. But listen, old hedgeball. I'm no old master myself. The only thing I ever painted was the town, and I used only one color then."

"So much the better," declared the father. "That will make it all the

more interesting for Betty, I'm sure. Bring your paints with you."

The youth nodded.

"One stipulation," continued Mr. Bodkins. "You agree with me not to attempt to make love to Betty."

"I do," acquiesced Freddy. "You flatter your family."

"You don't know my daughter," replied Mr. Bodkins. "Betty's a bird."

He opened his check-book.

"Wait," he said. "I'll give you a hundred dollars advance tuition on account."

"Double it," suggested Freddy.

He took the broker's paper for two hundred dollars, also his speedy departure.

"She'll like him fine!" declared Mr. Bodkins to himself as his door crashed shut. "And she ought to make a big hit with him. They trot about the same clip."

III.

At eight o'clock sharp the following morning a motor delivery-truck pulled up before the Bodkins residence. The driver and Frederick Ellingham Frazer alighted, and together they carried the cargo to the front porch. The load consisted of twelve cans of paint, holding one gallon each, and a dozen chisel-shaped brushes.

The driver and his vehicle departed. Freddy pushed the door-bell button. He instructed the Bodkins butler to summon Miss Bodkins, and not to stop on the way to play solitaire.

The man in livery glanced wonderingly from the house-painting paraphernalia to the card Freddy had handed him. It was Freddy's engraved bristol, and in the corner had been scribbled, "Professor of Art-Painting."

Betty Bodkins, stunningly beautiful in a glorious morning frock of pink, seemed a bit startled as she gazed at the visitor who was awaiting her in the reception hall.

"Why, Mr. Frazer!" she exclaimed. "When papa told me, I wondered if it could be the same Mr. Frazer!"

Freddy seemed a bit surprised, too.

"'Belle Bravo' is your stage name, I suppose," he remarked. "Your father didn't say anything about your theatrical career."

Each, you see, had fibbed to the other.

They'd chanced to meet, upon one occasion, in Central Park. Her motor had choked, and Freddy happened along just in time to crank it.

Indulging a sudden, unaccountable whim, he introduced himself to her as the Rev. Frederick Frazer. And, to duly shock him, she told him that she was a Miss Belle Bravo, of vaudeville fame. She drove him to one of his clubs, and they had not seen each other since.

"You haven't given up the ministry?" asked Betty.

"Oh, no!" answered Freddy. "I go in for art as a sort of side line. We clergymen can't study our text and prepare sermons all of the time."

"I should think that would be wearisome," sympathized Betty.

"Not wearisome," amended the young man, slight reproach showing in his innocent blue eyes. "Just kind of monotonous. So, if I can do any good work of a slightly different nature, such as showing a young lady how to become an old master, I regard it as a pleasure, indeed."

Betty looked up at him, enraptured. She never had known young clergymen. All the young men of her previous acquaintance had been young men of the world, worldly. This was a novel, an entertaining experience.

"Are you going to begin teaching me this morning?" she asked eagerly. "Daddy didn't say anything to me about your being a minister."

"He probably isn't wise to it," Freddy explained. "I didn't mention the fact to him. Brokers, as a rule, aren't generally very keen for that sort of thing, you know; and I don't be-

lieve in arousing animosity where there's no need.

"That 'animosity' is a great word, isn't it? I got it out of an advertisement. Sure, I'm ready to teach you this morning if it's convenient for you. We can't get started any too soon. I left my kit of tools outside."

"Oh," said Betty, "let me see it!"

Together they went to the porch. She helped him carry his equipment to her pink-and-white sewing-room on the second floor. It took them three trips.

"Aren't these brushes rather big, Mr. Frazer?" Betty asked, surveying doubtfully the assortment he had secured.

They were the kind of brushes fence-decorators and calciminers use.

"And how odd to get the paint in big cans like these," she continued. "I always thought that artists' paint came in little tubes—like tooth paste."

He almost said, "By crickey, that's right, isn't it?" Instead, he replied, smiling tolerantly: "Well, you see, my dear young lady, while that was true in times past, nowadays artists strive for the big, broad, bold effects. They make heavy strokes. Perhaps you've noticed the work of present-day old masters. It's all done that way."

"That is true!" she declared.

He grinned.

"Is it, honestly?" he asked curiously.

"Now, if you're going to talk to me as if I were a little girl!" Betty demurred, somewhat displeased.

"Certainly not!" he protested. "Excuse me. It was just my absent-mindedness. All of us clergymen are more or less absent-minded."

"Are they?" she asked.

"It's the fashion," he explained. "Well, let's begin. Oh, Helen! Oh, Helen, I forgot to bring a canvas!"

"My name isn't Helen!" she corrected innocently. "It's Betty!"

"Oh, yes—so it is!"

He gazed down into her great brown-and-white eyes, and realized, suddenly, their greatness.

"Well, Betty," he suggested with a sigh, "let's begin. We'll paint the first picture right on that wall over there. It's white, and it'll take the paint fine. You paint the picture, and I'll paint a frame round it. I brought a can of gold paint along. When we're finished every one will think it's an old master in a frame hanging there. I'll paint a nail, too, to hang it up by."

She danced and clapped her hands joyously.

"That'll be jolly!" said she. "What shall I paint, portrait or landscape?"

"You'd best start with a simple pastoral scene," he decided. "Maybe by the time you're through it'll be a portrait or something else. One never can tell about those things."

"Pastoral?" she repeated with a rising inflection. "What kind of a painting is that, Mr. Frazer?"

For a moment he thought the matter over, trying to recall just where he'd heard the term used.

"Oh, yes!" he replied firmly. "Oh, pastoral? Pastoral — pastures—don't you see, my dear? A pastoral scene is a picture of pastures—green pastures. I brought along a can of green—so it's all right."

"May I put a house in it, please?" she asked.

"That wouldn't be a bad idea at all," he admitted thoughtfully. "I'll pry the tops off these cans."

He broke all three blades of his pearl penknife and spotted the carpet generously, but at last off all the twelve lids came. He handed her a three-inch brush.

"How shall I begin?" Betty asked.

He considered the matter studiously.

"Just begin, Betty," he directed at last.

"Oh," said she, "it's much easier than I thought! I had an idea there were a lot of rules and things to it."

"No, that's a popular misconception," he assured her. "Nothing like rules in the old master game. When a painter wants to paint, why he just goes ahead and does it, don't you see?

It's very simple. One needn't learn it, like one would horseshoeing, or something hard like that."

"My!" she exclaimed. "I like the way you teach, Mr. Frazer. You don't make it tedious at all. My violin teacher is just terribly particular! How do I hold the brush, Mr. Frazer?"

He took his pupil's fingers in his and showed her how — an artist grips his paint-brush exactly as a carpenter does his hammer.

"Let's hurry and begin," he suggested eagerly. "You start on the picture, and I'll start to paint a gold frame around it."

He dipped a brush into the gilt can and started making scrolls on her white sewing-room wall.

"Hadn't I better get a piece of chalk from my work-basket and mark off a square where the picture's to be?" Betty asked.

"That wouldn't be a bad idea, considering that you're only a beginner," he said. "Professionals and old masters never do that, though."

He helped her with the dimensions, then again joyously besieged the wall with a volley of gold.

For an hour, then for another, then for a third, they worked industriously. His frame was a marvel to behold. And her landscape—a blind man could have seen the noise from miles away.

He stepped back and surveyed her work critically.

"Very good indeed, Betty," he pronounced, after having given the wall minute inspection. "Very good, indeed. The only criticism I can offer is that you painted your perspective in the wrong color."

She became dismayed—she had tried so hard.

"Oh, it's nothing serious, Betty," he assured her, feeling very guilty as he noted her chagrin. "It's nothing serious at all, dear. It doesn't mar the picture, viewing it as a whole. Perspective in painting isn't important, anyway."

Betty felt relieved — and looked it. Her face was flushed; she had worked industriously.

"The only thing that I would suggest," he added, "is that you put a flag on that farmhouse. We've plenty of paint left, and a red, white and blue pennant would add considerably to the tone, as well as improve the perspective."

"That's a glorious suggestion," she declared. "I'm a wee bit tired, though," she confessed. "Would you mind painting it in for me, Mr. Frazer?"

"Object? Well, I should say not!"

Joyously he fetched a chair for her, and then set about erecting a staff and unfurling our national flag.

"It's really beautiful!" Betty declared.

"I think it is," he agreed. "It isn't all dull and shadowy, like so many of the pictures one sees."

"The frame helps out the picture wonderfully," said Betty generously.

"It's not such a worse frame," Freddy confessed modestly.

"Will you come again to-morrow morning to give me my second lesson, Mr. Frazer?" Betty asked anxiously.

"Most certain thing you know," he promised. "You're the most apt pupil I've ever had. I'm getting very fond of you. Now your eyes, for example; I've never seen other eyes that reflect the soul as those of yours do. I'll bet you can waltz like the very dickens, too. Betty dear, do you suppose you could ever learn to care—"

Suddenly he thought of the promise he so readily had given her father.

He looked down at her. Betty's lips were pursed temptingly. He reached—for his hat.

"I beg your pardon, Betty," he attempted to explain. "I just happened to think of something I'd entirely forgotten."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"My Scripture study," he told her. "I must hasten thither. I study an hour every morning, and I'm late."

He bolted down the stairs. She followed and opened the outside door for him. He gravely shook hands with her, hailing a passing taxi, and was gone.

IV.

"DADDY," began Betty that noon—"daddy, do come up and see the pastoral painting I made. Mr. Frazer painted the frame."

Mr. Bodkins obediently puffed up the stairs. The mural decoration came into view. He made a surprised exclamation that sounded somewhat profane. Betty understood, though, when he told her that his admiration had given incentive to the outburst.

"We're going to decorate all the walls this way; all the walls in all the rooms," explained Betty enthusiastically. "One wall a morning."

Mr. Bodkins swallowed. He possessed no critical knowledge of art—and he knew it. But neither did he possess a love for the horrible. He sighed resignedly. It wasn't the expense that worried him; but he did hate the idea of having a papering crew round again.

"That'll be lovely, dear," said he bravely. One last glance he took at the pastoral painting. "Come on, Betty; let's go down to lunch."

During the meal Mr. Bodkins noticed that his daughter merely nibbled. She usually had a healthy appetite, but to-day her thoughts were miles above chicken *en casserole*.

At the last the inner-man Bodkins was satisfied. The broker folded his napkin, shoved his plate aside, and lighted a perfecto.

"Daddy," spoke his charming daughter, a deeper, softer glow in her great, brown eyes — "daddy, how would you like to have a lovely young clergyman for a son-in-law? It would be perfectly glorious, wouldn't it, daddy dear?"

Daddy placed his newly lighted cigar on a saucer, arose with sad determination, and walked to the window.

Looking out he saw a hideous, multicolored landscape. In the foreground loomed a purple farmhouse. On it, floating in an ochre breeze, was a flag of pronounced red, white, and blue.

He saw a natty youth, with baby-blue eyes, and silently, but none the less fervently, cursed him for neglect of duty. He saw his own boon companions poking him in the ribs and "kidding" him on the minister question. He recalled, indignantly, that he always had been respected by his colleagues.

He wheeled round and faced his daughter.

"Betty darling," he asked kindly, "you love your daddy, don't you?"

She put two deliciously curved arms up round his neck.

"You're the dearest daddy in all the world—the only one I have," she declared softly.

"Listen, Betty," said he. "You're not to speak to me of that clergyman for a week. Promise?"

Sorrowfully, Betty promised. He left for his office, deep in gloom.

V.

THE door of the broker's private office flew open and Freddy Frazer flew in. His hair was mussed and his tie awry. Manifestly, something had at last been able to excite him.

"Pudge Rupert said you're looking for me," blurted the young man. "I was coming up, anyway. I tender my resignation as professor of art-painting for your daughter. I want to quit."

"You're a rotten poor specimen of an art professor, you are!" shouted Bodkins. He pounded his mahogany desk with a tightly clenched fist. "You're a bungler, an incompetent—that's what you are!"

Freddy stood as though changed to stone. His blue eyes shot fire. Finally words came.

"You're no judge of fine art, you money-ridden plute!" he yelled.

Bodkins's anger was contagious, and Freddy thought he had a grievance of his own.

"Who do you think you are to offer criticism on a pastorial painting?"

"Pastoral painting, prunes!" ejaculated Bodkins — and he pounded his desk in a new spot.

"I quit," continued Freddy. "And that releases me from my promise. Hereafter I'll make love to your daughter all I ding please! Nobody but a cad of a cowardly Wall Street broker would tie a young man with a promise like you did me.

"I'm not so black as I'm painted. I'm a free-born American citizen. I've always been straight — poker's the worst I've done—it was for cards that the old man kicked me out.

"I love your daughter, and I think she's going to learn to love me. I think she's half-way in love with me already. Anyway, whether she is or not, I'll court her whenever I feel like it. Get that straight, you wall-eyed son of Mammon!"

Mr. Bodkins wiped his brow.

"She's in love with you!" he sneered. "You're crazy, Frazer. You're crazy as a loon. I thought if I told you not to win the girl that would be what you'd surely do. But you beefed it, you ignoramus. She's determined to marry a stick of a clergyman. Confound it, Frazer, I won't have a minister in my family! The boys here on the Street would kid the life out of me.

"Pudge Rupert said you had nerve and brains. I'll sign blank checks and let you fill in figures to suit yourself. If there's a spark of manhood in that big, husky hulk of yours, go down to my house and win my daughter. Your father and I went to the same school. We fight each other on 'Change. Working together, he and I could elect a President. If you don't do as I tell you I'll poke your pie face!"

For sixty seconds after the close of Bodkins's oration Freddy stood stock still and blinked. Then he grinned. Then he chuckled. Then he laughed aloud.

"You're dippy," stated Mr. Bodkins.

"Why, you mutton-head!" declared the youth. "I'm the young clergyman Betty's raving about. I'm your promising young minister. Why, you old fool rutabaga, a girl will fall for that kind of bunk, but I didn't expect it of a Wall Street broker. I believe I'll go over to your house and paint a bit."

He approached the elder man and extended his hand. Tears were coursing down the cheeks of De Witte J. Bodkins.

"What is it to be this time?" he asked, overcome with joy.

He found that he had become exceedingly fond of the blue-eyed, muscular son of his old friend and competitor.

"Portrait, this afternoon," replied Frederick Ellingham Frazer. "Picture of Daniel Cupid." He grinned. "Say, old crocodile, better come along with me. You're needed bad."

"What for?" asked Betty's father.

Freddy grinned anew.

"To pose," he replied.

AN EPITAPH.

By George John Cayley.

A LOVELY young lady I mourn in my rimes:
She was pleasant, good-natured, and civil sometimes.
Her figure was good; she had very fine eyes,
And her talk was a mixture of foolish and wise.
Her adorers were many, and one of them said:
"She waltzed rather well! It's a pity she's dead."

Warlord of Mars

by Edgar Rice Burroughs

A Sequel to "Under the Moons of Mars" and "The Gods of Mars"

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

JOHN CARTER, accompanied by Woola, his Martian dog, pursues Mat'ai Shang, a thern, and a black man, Thurid, who have abducted from the Temple of the Sun, Dejah Thoris, Phaidor, and Thuvia of Ptarth. They follow them to a mountain castle belonging to the thern, and Carter is about to rescue his princess from being carried off in a flier when Thurid pushes him from the battlements of the castle-tower. By fortune he escapes, and still with Woola, makes his way to the equatorial Martian country, Kaol. Here he again almost succeeds in rescuing his princess, but the thern treacherously escapes with his captives and makes off to the southward. Carter, accompanied by Thuvan Dihn, the father of Thuvia, sets out in pursuit. They finally get to the south pole of Mars, where they are stopped by a huge ice-barrier. Through this, however, they force their way, and are about to proceed into the country of the yellow men when they see one of the latter ambuscaded by six of his fellows. Carter, unable to stand the sight of this treachery, immediately jumps into the fray.

Disguised, Carter and Thuvan Dihn reach Kadabra, the capital of the yellow men. Talu gives Carter a ring of remarkable magnetic powers, which will doubtless assist him in his search. Their disguises are penetrated, and after Salensus Oll, ruler of the yellow men, has sworn to marry Dejah Thoris, Carter is led to the Pit of Plenty.

Just before he is lowered into the pit a yellow man (apparently) who wears a ring like Carter's, whispers encouragement.

CHAPTER XI *(continued)*.

THE PIT OF PLENTY.

THE pit, which my imagination had pictured as bottomless, proved to be not more than a hundred feet in depth; but as its walls were smoothly polished it might as well have been a thousand feet, for I could never hope to escape without outside assistance.

For a day I was left in darkness; and then, quite suddenly, a brilliant light illumined my strange cell. I was reasonably hungry and thirsty by this time, not having tasted food or drink since the day prior to my incarceration.

To my amazement I found the sides of the pit, that I had thought smooth, lined with shelves, upon which were the most delicious viands and liquid refreshments that Okar afforded.

With an exclamation of delight I sprang forward to partake of some of the welcome food, but ere ever I reached it the light was extinguished, and, though I groped my way about the chamber, my hands came in contact with nothing beside the smooth, hard wall that I had felt on my first examination of my prison.

Immediately the pangs of hunger and thirst began to assail me. Where before I had had but a mild craving for food and drink, I now actually suffered for want of it, and all because of the tantalizing sight that I had had of food almost within my grasp.

Once more darkness and silence enveloped me, a silence that was broken only by a single mocking laugh.

For another day nothing occurred to break the monotony of my imprisonment or relieve the suffering superinduced by hunger and thirst. Slowly the pangs became less keen, as suffering deadened the activity of certain nerves; and then the light flashed on once again, and before me stood an array of new and tempting dishes, with great bottles of clear water and flagons of refreshing wine, upon the outside of which the cold sweat of condensation stood.

Again, with the hunger madness of a wild beast, I sprang forward to seize those tempting dishes; but, as before, the light went out and I came to a sudden stop against a hard, bare wall.

Then the mocking laugh rang out for a second time.

The Pit of Plenty!

Ah, what a cruel mind must have devised this exquisite, hellish torture! Day after day was the thing repeated, until I was on the verge of madness; and then, as I had done in the pits of the Warhoons, I took a new, firm hold upon my reason and forced it back into the channels of sanity.

By sheer will-power I regained control over my tottering mentality, and so successful was I that the next time that the light came I sat quite still and looked indifferently at the fresh and tempting food almost within my reach. Glad I was that I had done so, for it gave me an opportunity to solve the seeming mystery of those vanishing banquets.

As I made no move to reach the food, the torturers left the light turned on in the hope that at last I could refrain no longer from giving them the delicious thrill of enjoyment that my former futile efforts to obtain it had caused.

And as I sat scrutinizing the laden shelves I presently saw how the thing was accomplished, and so simple was it that I wondered I had not before guessed it. The wall of my prison was of clearest glass—behind the glass were the tantalizing viands.

After nearly an hour the light went out, but this time there was no mocking laughter — at least not upon the part of my tormentors; but I, to be at quits with them, gave a low laugh that none might mistake for the cackle of a maniac.

Nine days passed, and I was weak from hunger and thirst, but no longer suffering — I was past that. Then, down through the darkness above, a little parcel fell to the floor at my side.

Indifferently I groped for it, thinking it but some new invention of my jailers to add to my sufferings.

At last I found it—a tiny package wrapped in paper, at the end of a strong and slender cord. As I opened it a few lozenges fell to the floor. As I gathered them up, feeling of them and smelling of them, I discovered that they were tablets of concentrated food such as are quite common in all parts of Barsoom.

Poison! I thought.

Well, what of it? Why not end my misery now rather than drag out a few more wretched days in this dark pit? Slowly I raised one of the little pellets to my lips.

"Good-by, my Dejah Thoris!" I breathed. "I have lived for you and fought for you, and now my next dearest wish is to be realized, for I shall die for you," and, taking the morsel in my mouth, I devoured it.

One by one I ate them all, nor ever did anything taste better than those tiny bits of nourishment, within which I knew must lie the seeds of death—possibly of some hideous, torturing death.

As I sat quietly upon the floor of

my prison, waiting for the end, my fingers by accident came in contact with the bit of paper in which the things had been wrapped; and as I idly played with it, my mind roaming far back into the past, that I might live again for a few brief moments before I died some of the many happy moments of a long and happy life, I became aware of strange protuberances upon the smooth surface of the parchmentlike substance in my hands.

For a time they carried no special significance to my mind—I merely was mildly wondrous that they were there; but at last they seemed to take form, and then I realized that there was but a single line of them, like writing.

Now, more interestedly, my fingers traced and retraced them. There were four separate and distinct combinations of raised lines. Could it be that these were four words, and that they were intended to carry a message to me?

The more I thought of it the more excited I became, until my fingers raced madly back and forth over those bewildering little hills and valleys upon that bit of paper.

But I could make nothing of them, and at last I decided that my very haste was preventing me from solving the mystery. Then I took it more slowly. Again and again my forefinger traced the first of those four combinations.

Martian writing is rather difficult to explain to an earthman—it is something of a cross between shorthand and picture-writing, and is an entirely different language from the spoken language of Mars.

Upon Barsoom there is but a single oral language.

It is spoken to-day by every race and nation, just as it was at the beginning of human life upon Barsoom. It has grown with the growth of the planet's learning and scientific achievements, but so ingenious a thing it is that new words to express new thoughts or describe new conditions or discoveries form themselves — no other word could explain the thing that a new word is required for other than the word that naturally falls to it, and so, no matter how far removed two nations or races, their spoken languages are identical.

Not so their written languages, however. No two nations have the same written language, and often cities of the same nation have a written language that differs greatly from that of the nation to which they belong.

Thus it was that the signs upon the paper, if in reality they were words, baffled me for some time; but at last I made out the first one.

It was "courage," and it was written in the letters of Marentina.

Courage!

That was the word the yellow guardsman had whispered in my ear as I stood upon the verge of the Pit of Plenty.

The message must be from him, and he I knew was a friend.

With renewed hope I bent my every energy to the deciphering of the balance of the message, and at last success rewarded my endeavor — I had read the four words:

"Courage! Follow the rope."

CHAPTER XII.

"FOLLOW THE ROPE!"

WHAT could it mean?

"Follow the rope." What rope?

Presently I recalled the cord that had been attached to the parcel when it fell at my side, and after a little groping my hand came in contact with it again. It depended from above, and when I pulled upon it I discovered that it was rigidly fastened, possibly at the pit's mouth.

Upon examination I found that the cord, though small, was amply able to sustain the weight of several men. Then I made another discovery—

there was a second message knotted in the rope at about the height of my head. This I deciphered more easily, now that the key was mine.

"Bring the rope with you. Beyond the knots lies danger."

That was all there was to this message. It was evidently hastily formed—an afterthought.

I did not pause longer than to learn the contents of the second message, and, though I was none too sure of the meaning of the final admonition, "Beyond the knots lies danger," yet I was sure that here before me lay an avenue of escape, and that the sooner I took advantage of it the more likely was I to win to liberty.

At least, I could be but little worse off than I had been in the Pit of Plenty.

I was to find, however, ere I was well out of that damnable hole that I might have been very much worse off had I been compelled to remain there another two minutes.

It had taken me about that length of time to ascend some fifty feet above the bottom when a noise above attracted my attention. To my chagrin I saw that the covering of the pit was being removed far above me, and in the light of the courtyard beyond I saw a number of yellow warriors.

Could it be that I was laboriously working my way into some new trap? Were the messages spurious, after all? And then, just as my hope and courage had ebbed to their lowest, I saw two things.

One was the body of a huge, struggling, snarling apt being lowered over the side of the pit toward me, and the other was an aperture in the side of the shaft—an aperture larger than a man's body, into which my rope led.

Just as I scrambled into the dark hole before me the apt passed me, reaching out with his mighty hands to clutch me, and snapping, growling, and roaring in a most frightful manner.

Plainly now I saw the end for which Salensus Oll had destined me. After first torturing me with starvation he had caused this fierce beast to be lowered into my prison to finish the work that the jeddak's hellish imagination had conceived.

And then another truth flashed upon me—I had lived nine days of the allotted ten which must intervene before Salensus Oll could make Dejah Thoris his queen. The purpose of the apt was to insure my death before the tenth day.

I almost laughed aloud as I thought how Salensus Oll's measure of safety was to aid in defeating the very end he sought, for when they discovered that the apt was alone in the Pit of Plenty they could not know but that he had completely devoured me, and so no suspicion of my escape would cause a search to be made for me.

Coiling the rope that had carried me thus far upon my strange journey, I sought for the other end, but found that as I followed it forward it extended always before me. So this was the meaning of the words: "Follow the rope."

The tunnel through which I crawled was low and dark. I had followed it for several hundred yards when I felt a knot beneath my fingers. "Beyond the knots lies danger."

Now I went with the utmost caution, and a moment later a sharp turn in the tunnel brought me to an opening into a lighted chamber.

The trend of the tunnel I had been traversing had been slightly upward, and from this I judged that the chamber into which I now found myself looking must be either on the first floor of the palace or directly beneath the first floor.

Upon the opposite wall were many strange instruments and devices, and in the center of the room stood a long table, at which two men were seated in earnest conversation.

He who faced me was a yellow man—a little, wizened up, pasty-faced old fellow with great eyes that showed the

white round the entire circumference of the iris.

His companion was a black man, and I did not need to see his face to know that it was Thurid, for there was no other of the First Born north of the ice barrier.

Thurid was speaking as I came within hearing of the men's voices.

"Solan," he was saying, "there is no risk and the reward is great. You know that you hate Salensus Oll and that nothing would please you more than to thwart him in some cherished plan. There is nothing that he more cherishes to-day than the idea of wedding the beautiful Princess of Helium; but I, too, want her, and with your help I may win her.

"You need not more than step from this room for an instant when I give you the signal. I will do the rest, and then, when I am gone, you may come and throw the great switch back into its place, and all will be as before. I need but an hour's start to be safe beyond the devilish power that you control in this hidden chamber beneath the palace of your master. See how easy," and with the words the black dator rose from his seat and, crossing the room, laid his hand upon a large, burnished lever that protruded from the opposite wall.

"No! No!" cried the little old man, springing after him, with a wild shriek. "Not that one! Not that one! That controls the sun-ray tanks, and should you pull it too far down all Kadabra would be consumed by heat before I could replace it. Come away! Come away! You know not with what mighty powers you play. This is the lever that you seek. Note well the symbol inlaid in white upon its ebon surface."

Thurid approached and examined the handle of the lever.

"Ah, a magnet," he said. "I will remember. It is settled then I take it," he continued.

The old man hesitated. A look of combined greed and apprehension overspread his none too beautiful features.

"Double the figure," he said. "Even that were all too small an amount for the service you ask. Why, I risk my life by even entertaining you here within the forbidden precincts of my station. Should Salensus Oll learn of it he would have me thrown to the apts before the day was done."

"He dare not do that, and you know it full well, Solan," contradicted the black. "Too great a power of life and death you hold over the people of Kadabra for Salensus Oll ever to risk threatening you with death. Before ever his minions could lay their hands upon you, you might seize this very lever from which you have just warned me and wipe out the entire city."

"And myself into the bargain," said Solan, with a shudder.

"But if you were to die, anyway, you would find the nerve to do it," replied Thurid.

"Yes," muttered Solan, "I have often thought upon that very thing. Well, First Born, is your red princess worth the price I ask for my services, or will you go without her and see her in the arms of Salensus Oll to-morrow night?"

"Take your price, yellow man," replied Thurid, with an oath. "Half now and the balance when you have fulfilled your contract."

With that the dator threw a well-filled money-pouch upon the table.

Solan opened the pouch and with trembling fingers counted its contents. His weird eyes assumed a greedy expression, and his unkempt beard and mustache twitched with the muscles of his mouth and chin. It was quite evident from his every mannerism that Thurid had keenly guessed the man's weakness—even the clawlike, clutching movement of the fingers betokened the avariciousness of the miser.

Having satisfied himself that the amount was correct, Solan replaced the money in the pouch and rose from the table.

"Now," he said, "are you quite sure that you know the way to your destination? You must travel quickly to cover the ground to the cave and from thence beyond the Great Power, all within a brief hour, for no more dare I spare you."

"Let me repeat it to you," said Thurid, "that you may see if I be letter perfect."

"Proceed," replied Solan.

"Through yonder door," he commenced, pointing to a door at the far end of the apartment, "I follow a corridor, passing three diverging corridors upon my right; then into the fourth right-hand corridor straight to where three corridors meet; here again I follow to the right, hugging the left wall closely to avoid the pit.

"At the end of this corridor I shall come to a spiral runway, which I must follow down instead of up; after that the way is along but a single branchless corridor. Am I right?"

"Quite right, dator," answered Solan; "and now begone. Already have you tempted fate too long within this forbidden place."

"To-night, or to-morrow, then, you may expect the signal," said Thurid, rising to go.

"To-night, or to-morrow," repeated Solan, and as the door closed behind his guest the old man continued to mutter as he turned back to the table, where he again dumped the contents of the money-pouch, running his fingers through the heap of shining metal; piling the coins into little towers; counting, recounting, and fondling the wealth the while he muttered on and on in a crooning undertone.

Presently his fingers ceased their play; his eyes popped wider than ever as they fastened upon the door through which Thurid had disappeared. The croon changed to a querulous muttering, and finally to an ugly growl.

Then the old man rose from the table, shaking his fist at the closed door. Now he raised his voice, and his words came distinctly to my ears.

"Fool!" he muttered. "Think you that for your happiness Solan will give up his life? If you escaped, Salensus Oll would know that only through my connivance could you have succeeded. Then would he send for me. What would you have me do? Reduce the city and myself to ashes! No, fool, there is a better way—a better way for Solan to keep thy money and be revenged upon Salensus Oll."

He laughed in a nasty, cackling note.

"Poor fool! You may throw the great switch that will give you the freedom of the air of Okar, and then, in fatuous security, go on with thy red princess to the freedom of—death. When you have passed beyond this chamber in your flight, what can prevent Solan replacing the switch as it was before your vile hand touched it? Nothing; and then the guardian of the north will claim you and your woman, and Salensus Oll, when he sees your dead bodies, will never dream that the hand of Solan had aught to do with the thing."

Then his voice dropped once more into mutterings that I could not translate, but I had heard enough to cause me to guess a great deal more, and I thanked the kind Providence that had led me to this chamber at a time so filled with importance to Dejah Thoris and myself as this.

But how to pass the old man now! The cord, almost invisible upon the floor, stretched straight across the apartment to a door upon the far side.

There was no other way of which I knew, nor could I afford to ignore the advice to "follow the rope." I must cross this room, but however I should accomplish it undetected with that old man in the very center of it baffled me.

Of course I might have sprung in upon him and with my bare hands silenced him forever, but I had heard enough to convince me that with him alive the knowledge that I had gained might serve me at some future moment, while should I kill him and an-

other be stationed in his place Thurid would not come hither with Dejah Thoris, as was quite evidently his intention.

As I stood in the dark shadows of the tunnel's end racking my brain for a feasible plan the while I watched, catlike, the old man's every move, he took up the money-pouch and crossed to one end of the apartment, where, bending to his knees, he fumbled with a panel in the wall.

Instantly I guessed that here was the hiding-place in which he hoarded his wealth, and while he bent there, his back toward me, I entered the chamber upon tiptoe, and with the utmost stealth essayed to reach the opposite side before he should complete his task and turn again toward the room's center.

Scarcely thirty steps, all told, must I take, and yet it seemed to my overwrought imagination that that farther wall was miles away; but at last I reached it, nor once had I taken my eyes from the back of the old miser's head.

He did not turn until my hand was upon the button that controlled the door through which my way led, and then he turned away from me as I passed through and closed the door gently behind me.

For an instant I paused, my ear close to the panel, to learn if he had suspected aught, but as no sound of pursuit came from within I wheeled and made my way along the new corridor, following the rope, which I coiled and brought with me as I advanced.

But a short distance farther on I came to the rope's end at a point where five corridors met. What was I to do? Which way should I turn? I was nonplused.

A careful examination of the end of the rope revealed the fact that it had been cleanly cut with some sharp instrument. This fact and the words that had cautioned me that danger lay beyond the knots convinced me that the rope had been severed since my friend had placed it as my guide, for I had but passed a single knot, whereas there had evidently been two or more in the entire length of the cord.

Now, indeed, was I in a pretty fix, for neither did I know which avenue to follow nor when danger lay directly in my path; but there was nothing else to be done than follow one of the corridors, for I could gain nothing by remaining where I was.

So I chose the central opening, and passed on into its gloomy depths with a prayer upon my lips.

The floor of the tunnel rose rapidly as I advanced, and a moment later the way came to an abrupt end before a heavy door.

I could hear nothing beyond, and, with my accustomed rashness, pushed the portal wide to step into a room filled with yellow warriors.

The first to see me opened his eyes wide in astonishment, and at the same instant I felt the tingling sensation in my finger that denoted the presence of a friend of the ring.

Then others saw me, and there was a concerted rush to lay hands upon me, for these were all members of the palace guard—men familiar with my face.

The first to reach me was the wearer of the mate to my strange ring, and as he came close he whispered: "Surrender to me!" then in a loud voice shouted: "You are my prisoner, white man," and menaced me with his two weapons.

And so John Carter, Prince of Helium, meekly surrendered to a single antagonist. The others now swarmed about us, asking many questions, but I would not talk to them, and finally my captor announced that he would lead me back to my cell.

An officer ordered several other warriors to accompany him, and a moment later we were retracing the way I had just come. My friend walked close beside me, asking many silly questions about the country from which I had come, until finally his fellows paid no

further attention to him or his gabbling.

Gradually, as he spoke, he lowered his voice, so that presently he was able to converse with me in a low tone without attracting attention. His ruse was a clever one, and showed that Talu had not misjudged the man's fitness for the dangerous and delicate duty upon which he was detailed.

When he had fully assured himself that the other guardsmen were not listening, he asked me why I had not followed the rope, and when I told him that it had exiled at the five corridors he said that it must have been cut by some one in need of a piece of rope, for he was sure that "the stupid Kadabrans would never have guessed its purpose."

Before we had reached the spot from which the five corridors diverge my Marentinian friend had managed to drop to the rear of the little column with me, and when we came in sight of the branching ways he whispered:

"Run up the first upon the right. It leads to the watch-tower upon the south wall. I will direct the pursuit up the next corridor," and with that he gave me a great shove into the dark mouth of the tunnel, at the same time crying out in simulated pain and alarm as he threw himself upon the floor as though I had felled him with a blow.

From behind the voices of the excited guardsmen came reverberating along the corridor, suddenly growing fainter as Talu's spy led them up the wrong passageway in fancied pursuit.

As I ran for my life through the dark galleries beneath the palace of Salensus Oll I must indeed have presented a remarkable appearance had there been any to note it, for though death loomed large about me, my face was split by a broad grin as I thought of the resourcefulness of the nameless hero of Marentina to whom I owed my life.

Of such stuff are the men of my beloved Helium, and when I meet another of their kind, of whatever race or color, my heart goes out to him as it did now to my new friend who had risked his life for me simply because I wore the mate to the ring his ruler had put upon his finger.

The corridor along which I ran led almost straight for a considerable distance, terminating at the foot of a spiral runway, up which I proceeded to emerge presently into a circular chamber upon the first floor of a tower.

In this apartment a dozen red slaves were employed polishing or repairing the weapons of the yellow men. The walls of the room were lined with racks in which were hundreds of straight and hooked swords, javelins, and daggers. It was evidently an armory. There were but three warriors guarding the workers.

My eyes took in the entire scene at a glance. Here were weapons in plenty! Here were sinewy red warriors to wield them!

And here now was John Carter, Prince of Helium, in need both of weapons and warriors!

As I stepped into the apartment guards and prisoners saw me simultaneously.

Close to the entrance where I stood was a rack of straight swords, and as my hand closed upon the hilt of one of them my eyes fell upon the faces of two of the prisoners who worked side by side.

One of the guards started toward me. "Who are you?" he demanded. "What do you here?"

"I come for Tardos Mors, Jeddak of Helium, and his son, Mors Kajak," I cried, pointing to the two red prisoners, who had now sprung to their feet, wide-eyed in astonished recognition.

"Rise, red men! Before we die let us leave a memorial in the palace of Okar's tyrant that will stand forever in the annals of Kadabra to the honor and glory of Helium," for I had seen that all the prisoners there were men of Tardos Mors's navy.

Then the first guardsman was upon me and the fight was on, but scarce did we engage ere, to my horror, I saw that the red slaves were shackled to the floor.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAGNET-SWITCH.

THE guardsmen paid not the slightest attention to their wards, for the red men could not move over two feet from the great rings to which they were padlocked, though each had seized a weapon upon which he had been engaged when I entered the room, and stood ready to join me could they have but done so.

The yellow men devoted all their attention to me, nor were they long in discovering that the three of them were none too many to defend the armory against John Carter. Would that I had had my own good long-sword in my hand that day; but, as it was, I rendered a satisfactory account of myself with the unfamiliar weapon of the yellow men.

At first I had a time of it dodging their villainous hook-swords, but after a minute or two I had succeeded in wresting a second straight sword from one of the racks along the wall, and thereafter, using it to parry the hooks of my antagonists, I felt more evenly equipped.

The three of them were on me at once, and but for a lucky circumstance my end might have come quickly. The foremost guardsman made a vicious lunge for my side with his hook after the three of them had backed me against the wall, but as I side-stepped and raised my arm his weapon but grazed my side, passing into a rack of javelins, where it became entangled.

Before he could release it I had run him through, and then, falling back upon the tactics that have saved me a hundred times in tight pinches, I rushed the two remaining warriors, forcing them back with a perfect torrent of cuts and thrusts, weaving my sword in and out about their guards until I had the fear of death upon them.

Then one of them commenced calling for help, but it was too late to save them.

They were as putty in my hands now, and I backed them about the armory as I would until I had them where I wanted them—within reach of the swords of the shackled slaves. In an instant both lay dead upon the floor. But their cries had not been entirely fruitless, for now I heard answering shouts and the footfalls of many men running and the clank of accouterments and the commands of officers.

"The door! Quick, John Carter, bar the door!" cried Tardos Mors.

Already the guard was in sight, charging across the open court.

A dozen seconds would bring them into the tower. A single leap carried me to the heavy portal. With a resounding bang I slammed it shut.

"The bar!" shouted Tardos Mors.

I tried to slip the huge fastening into place, but it defied my every attempt.

"Raise it a little to release the catch," cried one of the red men.

I could hear the yellow warriors leaping along the flagging just beyond the door. I raised the bar and shot it to the right just as the foremost of the guardsmen threw himself against the opposite side of the massive panels.

The barrier held — I had been in time, but by the fraction of a second only.

Now I turned my attention to the prisoners. To Tardos Mors I went first, asking where the keys might be which would unfasten their fetters.

"The officer of the guard has them," replied the Jeddak of Helium, "and he is among those without who seek entrance. You will have to force them."

Most of the prisoners were already hacking at their bonds with the swords in their hands. The yellow men were battering at the door with javelins and axes.

I turned my attention to the chains that held Tardos Mors. Again and again I cut deep into the metal with my sharp blade, but ever faster and faster fell the torrent of blows upon the portal.

At last a link parted beneath my efforts, and a moment later Tardos Mors was free, though a few inches of trailing chain still dangled from his ankle.

A splinter of wood falling inward from the door announced the headway that our enemies were making toward us.

The mighty panels trembled and bent beneath the furious onslaught of the enraged yellow men.

What with the battering upon the door and the hacking of the red men at their chains the din within the armory was appalling. No sooner was Tardos Mors free than he turned his attention to another of the prisoners, while I set to work to liberate Mors Kajak.

We must work fast if we would have all those fetters cut before the door gave way. Now a panel crashed inward upon the floor, and Mors Kajak sprang to the opening to defend the way until we should have time to release the others.

With javelins snatched from the wall he wrought havoc among the foremost of the Okarians while we battled with the insensate metal that stood between our fellows and freedom.

At length all but one of the prisoners were freed, and then the door fell with a mighty crash before a hastily improvised battering-ram, and the yellow horde was upon us.

"To the upper chambers!" shouted the red man who was still fettered to the floor. "To the upper chambers! There you may defend the tower against all Kadabra. Do not delay because of me, who could pray for no better death than in the service of Tardos Mors and the Prince of Helium."

But I would have sacrificed the life of every man of us rather than desert a single red man, much less the lion-hearted hero who begged us to leave him.

"Cut his chains," I cried to two of the red men, "while the balance of us hold off the foe."

There were ten of us now to do battle with the Okarian guard, and I warrant that that ancient watch-tower never looked down upon a more hotly contested battle than took place that day within its own grim walls.

The first inrushing wave of yellow warriors recoiled from the slashing blades of ten of Helium's veteran fighting men. A dozen Okarian corpses blocked the doorway, but over the gruesome barrier a score more of their fellows dashed, shouting their hoarse and hideous war cry.

Upon the bloody mound we met them, hand to hand, stabbing where the quarters were too close to cut, thrusting when we could push a foeman to arm's length; and mingled with the wild cry of the Okarians there rose and fell the glorious words: "For Helium! For Helium!" that for countless ages have spurred on the bravest of the brave to those deeds of valor that have sent the fame of Helium's heroes broadcast throughout the length and breadth of a world.

Now were the fetters struck from the last of the red men, and thirteen strong we met each new charge of the soldiers of Salensus Oll. Scarce one of us but bled from a score of wounds, yet none had fallen.

From without we saw hundreds of guardsmen pouring into the courtyard, and along the lower corridor from which I had found my way to the armory we could hear the clank of metal and the shouting of men.

In a moment we should be attacked from two sides, and with all our prowess we could not hope to withstand the unequal odds which would thus divide our attention and our numbers.

"To the upper chambers!" cried Tardos Mors, and a moment later we

fell back toward the runway that led to the floors above.

Here another bloody battle was waged with the force of yellow men who charged into the armory as we fell back from the doorway. Here we lost our first man, a noble fellow whom we could ill spare; but at length all had backed into the runway except myself, who remained to hold back the Okarians until the others were safe above.

In the mouth of the narrow spiral but a single warrior could attack me at a time, so that I had little difficulty in holding them all back for the brief moment that was necessary. Then, backing slowly before them, I commenced the ascent of the spiral.

All the long way to the tower's top the guardsmen pressed me closely. When one went down before my sword another scrambled over the dead man to take his place; and thus, taking an awful toll with each few feet gained, I came to the spacious glass-walled watch-tower of Kadabra.

Here my companions clustered, ready to take my place, and for a moment's respite I stepped to one side while they held the enemy off.

From the lofty perch a view could be had for miles in every direction. Toward the south stretched the rugged, ice-clad waste to the edge of the mighty barrier. Toward the east and west, and dimly toward the north I descried other Okarian cities, while in the immediate foreground, just beyond the walls of Kadabra, the grim guardian shaft reared its somber head.

Then I cast my eyes down into the streets of Kadabra, from which a sudden tumult had arisen, and there I saw a battle raging, and beyond the city's walls I saw armed men marching in great columns toward a near-by gate.

Eagerly I pressed forward against the glass wall of the observatory, scarce daring to credit the testimony of my own eyes. But at last I could doubt no longer, and with a shout of joy that rose strangely in the midst of the cursing and groaning of the battling men at the entrance to the chamber, I called to Tardos Mors.

As he joined me I pointed down into the streets of Kadabra and to the advancing columns beyond, above which floated bravely in the arctic air the flags and banners of Helium.

An instant later every red man in that lofty chamber had seen the inspiring sight, and such a shout of thanksgiving rose as never before echoed through that age-old pile.

But still we must fight on, for though our troops had entered Kadabra, the city was yet far from capitulation, nor had the palace been even assaulted. Turn and turn about we held the top of the runway while the others feasted their eyes upon the sight of our valiant countrymen battling far beneath us.

Now they have rushed the palace gate! Great battering-rams are dashed against its formidable surface. Now they are repulsed by a deadly shower of javelins from the wall's top!

Once again they charge, but a sortie by a large force of Okarians from an intersecting avenue crumples the head of the column, and the men of Helium go down, fighting beneath an overwhelming force.

The palace gate flies open and a force of the jeddak's own guard, picked men from the flower of the Okarian army, sallies forth to shatter the broken regiments. For a moment it looks as though nothing could avert defeat, and then I see a noble figure upon a mighty thoat — not the tiny thoat of the red man, but one of his huge cousins of the dead sea-bottoms.

The warrior hews his way to the front, and behind him rally the disorganized soldiers of Helium. As he raises his head aloft to fling a challenge at the men upon the palace walls I see his face, and my heart swells in pride and happiness as the red warriors leap to the side of their leader and win back the ground that they had but just lost —the face of him upon the mighty thoat is the face of my son—Carthoris of Helium.

At his side fights a huge Martian war-hound, nor did I need a second look to know that it was Woola—my faithful Woola who had thus well performed his arduous task and brought the succoring legions in the nick of time.

"In the nick of time?"

Who yet might say that they were not too late to save, but surely they could avenge! And such retribution as that unconquered army would deal out to the hateful Okarians! I sighed to think that I might not be alive to witness it.

Again I turned to the windows. The red men had not yet forced the outer palace wall, but they were fighting nobly against the best that Okar afforded — valiant warriors who contested every inch of the way.

Now my attention was caught by a new element without the city wall—a great body of mounted warriors looming large above the red men. They were the huge green allies of Helium —the savage hordes from the dead sea-bottoms of the far south.

In grim and terrible silence they sped on toward the gate, the padded hoofs of their frightful mounts giving forth no sound. Into the doomed city they charged, and as they wheeled across the wide plaza before the palace of the jeddak of jeddaks I saw, riding at their head, the mighty figure of their mighty leader — Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark.

My wish, then, was to be gratified, for I was to see my old friend battling once again, and though not shoulder to shoulder with him, I, too, would be fighting in the same cause here in the high tower of Okar.

Nor did it seem that our foes would ever cease their stubborn attacks, for still they came, though the way to our chamber was often clogged with the bodies of their dead. At times they would pause long enough to drag back the impeding corpses, and then fresh warriors would forge upward to taste the cup of death.

I had been taking my turn with the others in defending the approach to our lofty retreat when Mors Kajak, who had been watching the battle in the street below, called aloud in sudden excitement. There was a note of apprehension in his voice that brought me to his side the instant that I could turn my place over to another, and as I reached him he pointed far out across the waste of snow and ice toward the southern horizon.

"Alas!" he cried, "that I should be forced to witness cruel fate betray them without power to warn or aid; but they be past either now."

As I looked in the direction he indicated I saw the cause of his perturbation. A mighty fleet of fliers was approaching majestically toward Kadabra from the direction of the ice-barrier. On and on they came with ever-increasing velocity.

"The grim shaft that they call The Guardian of the North is beckoning to them," said Mors Kajak sadly, "just as it beckoned to Tardos Mors and his great fleet; see where they lie, crumpled and broken, a grim and terrible monument to the mighty force of destruction which naught can resist."

I, too, saw; but something else I saw that Mors Kajak did not; in my mind's eye I saw a buried chamber whose walls were lined with strange instruments and devices.

In the center of the chamber was a long table, and before it sat a little, pop-eyed old man counting his money; but, plainest of all, I saw upon the wall a great switch with a small magnet inlaid within the surface of its black handle.

Then I glanced out at the fast-approaching fleet. In five minutes that mighty armada of the skies would be bent and worthless scrap, lying at the base of the shaft beyond the city's wall, and yellow hordes would be loosed from another gate to rush out upon the few survivors stumbling blindly down through the mass of wreckage; then the apts would come. I shuddered at the thought.

Quick have I always been to decide and act. The impulse that moves me and the doing of the thing seem simultaneous; for if my mind goes through the tedious formality of reasoning, it must be a subconscious act of which I am not objectively aware. Psychologists tell me that, as the subconscious does not reason, too close a scrutiny of my mental activities might prove anything but flattering; but be that as it may, I have often won success while the thinker would have been still at the endless task of comparing various judgments.

And now celerity of action was the prime essential to the success of the thing that I had decided upon.

Grasping my sword more firmly in my hand, I called to the red men at the opening to the runway to stand aside.

"Way for the Prince of Helium!" I shouted; and before the astonished yellow man whose misfortune it was to be at the fighting end of the line at that particular moment could gather his wits together my sword had decapitated him, and I was rushing like a mad bull down upon those behind him.

"Way for the Prince of Helium!" I shouted as I cut a path through the astonished guardsmen of Salensus Oll.

Hewing to right and left, I beat my way down that warrior-choked spiral until, near the bottom, those below, thinking that an army was descending upon them, turned and fled.

The armory at the first floor was vacant when I entered it, the last of the Okarians having fled into the courtyard, so none saw me continue down the spiral toward the corridor beneath.

Here I ran as rapidly as my legs would carry me toward the five corners, and there plunged into the passageway that led to the station of the old miser.

Without the formality of a knock, I burst into the room. There sat the old man at his table; but as he saw me he sprang to his feet, drawing his sword.

With scarce more than a glance toward him, I leaped for the great switch; but, quick as I was, that wiry old fellow was there before me.

How he did it I shall never know, nor does it seem credible that any Martian-born creature could approximate the marvelous speed of my earthly muscles.

Like a tiger he turned upon me, and I was quick to see why Solan had been chosen for this important duty.

Never in all my life have I seen such wondrous swordsmanship and such uncanny agility as that ancient bag of bones displayed. He was in forty places at the same time, and before I had half a chance to wake up to my danger he was like to have made a monkey of me, and a dead monkey at that.

It is strange how new and unexpected conditions bring out unguessed ability to meet them.

That day in the buried chamber beneath the palace of Salensus Oll I learned what swordsmanship meant, and to what unthought of heights of sword mastery I could achieve when pitted against such a wizard of the blade as Solan.

For a time he liked to have bested me; but presently the latent possibilities that must have been lying dormant within me for a lifetime came to the fore, and I fought as I had never dreamed a human being could fight.

That that duel-royal should have taken place in the dark recesses of a cellar, without a single appreciative eye to witness it, has always seemed to me almost a world calamity—at least from the view-point Barsoomian, where bloody strife is the first and greatest consideration of individuals, nations, and races.

I was fighting to reach the switch, Solan to prevent me; and, though we stood not three feet from it, I could not win an inch toward it, nor he force me back an inch for the first five minutes of our battle.

I knew that if I were to throw it in time to save the oncoming fleet it must

be done in the next few seconds, and so I tried my old rushing tactics; but I might as well have rushed a brick wall for all that Solan gave way.

In fact, I came near to impaling myself upon his point for my pains; but right was on my side, and I think that that must give a man greater confidence than though he knew himself to be battling in a wicked cause.

At least, I did not want in confidence; and when I next rushed Solan it was to one side with implicit confidence that he must turn to meet my new line of attack, and turn he did, so that now we fought with our sides toward the coveted goal — the great switch stood within my reach upon my right hand.

To uncover my breast for an instant would have been to court sudden death, but I saw no other way than to chance it, if by so doing I might rescue that oncoming, succoring fleet; and so, in the face of a wicked sword-thrust, I reached out my point and caught the great switch a sudden blow that released it from its seating.

So surprised and horrified was Solan that he forgot to finish his thrust; instead, he wheeled toward the switch with a loud shriek—a shriek which was his last, for before his hand could touch the lever it sought my sword's point had passed through his heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TIDE OF BATTLE.

But Solan's last loud cry had not been without effect, for a moment later a dozen guardsmen burst into the chamber, though not before I had so bent and demolished the great switch that it could not be again used to turn the powerful current into the mighty magnet of destruction it controlled.

The result of the sudden coming of the guardsmen had been to compel me to seek seclusion in the first passageway that I could find, and that proved to be not the one with which I was familiar, but another upon its left.

They must have either heard or guessed which way I went, for I had proceeded but a short distance when I heard the sound of pursuit. I had no mind to stop and fight these men here when there was fighting aplenty elsewhere in the city of Kadabra—fighting that could be of much more avail to me and mine than useless life-taking far below the palace.

But the fellows were pressing me; and as I did not know the way at all, I soon saw that they would overtake me unless I found a place to conceal myself until they had passed, which would then give me an opportunity to return the way I had come and regain the tower, or possibly find a way to reach the city streets.

The passageway had risen rapidly since leaving the apartment of the switch, and now ran level and well lighted straight into the distance as far as I could see. The moment that my pursuers reached this straight stretch I would be in plain sight of them, with no chance to escape from the corridor undetected.

Presently I saw a series of doors opening from either side of the corridor, and as they all looked alike to me I tried the first one that I reached. It opened into a small chamber, luxuriously furnished, and was evidently an antechamber off some office or audience-chamber of the palace.

On the far side was a heavily curtained doorway beyond which I heard the hum of voices. Instantly I crossed the small chamber and, parting the curtains, looked within the larger apartment.

Before me were a party of perhaps fifty gorgeously clad nobles of the court, standing before a throne upon which sat Salensus Oll. The jeddak of jeddaks was addressing them.

"The allotted hour has come," he was saying as I entered the apartment; "and though the enemies of Okar be within her gates, naught may stay the will of Salensus Oll. The great ceremony must be omitted that no single

man may be kept from his place in the defenses other than the fifty that custom demands shall witness the creation of a new queen in Okar.

"In a moment the thing shall have been done and we may return to the battle, while she who is now the Princess of Helium looks down from the queen's tower upon the annihilation of her former countrymen and witnesses the greatness which is her husband's."

Then, turning to a courtier, he issued some command in a low voice.

The addressed hastened to a small door at the far end of the chamber and, swinging it wide, cried: "Way for Dejah Thoris, future Queen of Okar!"

Immediately two guardsmen appeared dragging the unwilling bride toward the altar. Her hands were still manacled behind her, evidently to prevent suicide.

Her disheveled hair and panting bosoms betokened that, chained though she was, still had she fought against the thing that they would do to her.

At sight of her Salensus Oll rose and drew his sword, and the sword of each of the fifty nobles was raised on high to form an arch, beneath which the poor, beautiful creature was dragged toward her doom.

A grim smile forced itself to my lips as I thought of the rude awakening that lay in store for the ruler of Okar, and my itching fingers fondled the hilt of my bloody sword.

As I watched the procession that moved slowly toward the throne—a procession which consisted of but a handful of priests, who followed Dejah Thoris and the two guardsmen — I caught a fleeting glimpse of a black face peering from behind the draperies that covered the wall back of the dais upon which stood Salensus Oll awaiting his bride.

Now the guardsmen were forcing the Princess of Helium up the few steps to the side of the tyrant of Okar, and I had no eyes and no thoughts for aught else. A priest opened a book and, raising his hand, commenced to drone out a sing-song ritual. Salensus Oll reached for the hand of his bride.

I had intended waiting until some circumstance should give me a reasonable hope of success; for, even though the entire ceremony should be completed, there could be no valid marriage while I lived. What I was most concerned in, of course, was the rescuing of Dejah Thoris—I wished to take her from the palace of Salensus Oll, if such a thing were possible; but whether it were accomplished before or after the mock marriage was a matter of secondary import.

When, however, I saw the vile hand of Salensus Oll reach out for the hand of my beloved princess I could restrain myself no longer, and before the nobles of Okar knew that aught had happened I had leaped through their thin line and was upon the dais beside Dejah Thoris and Salensus Oll.

With the flat of my sword I struck down his polluting hand; and grasping Dejah Thoris round the waist, I swung her behind me as, with my back against the draperies of the dais, I faced the tyrant of the north and his room full of noble warriors.

The jeddak of jeddaks was a great mountain of a man—a coarse, brutal beast of a man — and as he towered above me there, his fierce black whiskers and mustache bristling in rage, I can well imagine that a less seasoned warrior might have trembled before him.

With a snarl he sprang toward me with naked sword, but whether Salensus Oll was a good swordsman or a poor I never learned; for with Dejah Thoris at my back I was no longer human—I was a superman, and no man could have withstood me then.

With a single, low: "For the Princess of Helium!" I ran my blade straight through the rotten heart of Okar's rotten ruler, and before the white, drawn faces of his nobles Salensus Oll rolled, grinning in horrible death, to the foot of the steps below his marriage throne.

For a moment tense silence reigned in the nuptial-room. Then the fifty nobles rushed upon me. Furiously we fought, but the advantage was mine, for I stood upon a raised platform above them, and I fought for the most glorious woman of a glorious race, and I fought for a great love and for the mother of my boy.

And from behind my shoulder, in the silvery cadence of that dear voice, rose the brave battle anthem of Helium which the nation's women sing as their men march out to victory.

That alone was enough to inspire me to victory over even greater odds, and I verily believe that I should have bested the entire room full of yellow warriors that day in the nuptial chamber of the palace at Kadabra had not interruption come to my aid.

Fast and furious was the fighting as the nobles of Salensus Oll sprang, time and again, up the steps before the throne only to fall back before a sword-hand that seemed to have gained a new wizardry from its experience with the cunning Solan.

Two were pressing me so closely that I could not turn when I heard a movement behind me, and noted that the sound of the battle-anthem had ceased. Was Dejah Thoris preparing to take her place beside me?

Heroic daughter of a heroic world! It would not be unlike her to have seized a sword and fought at my side, for, though the women of Mars are not trained to the arts of war, the spirit is theirs, and they have been known to do that very thing upon countless occasions.

But she did not come, and glad I was, for it would have doubled my burden in protecting her before I should have been able to force her back again out of harm's way. She must be contemplating some cunning strategy, I thought, and so I fought on secure in the belief that my divine princess stood close behind me.

For half an hour at least I must have fought there against the nobles of Okar ere ever a one placed a foot upon the dais where I stood, and then of a sudden all that remained of them formed below me for a last, mad, desperate charge: but even as they advanced the door at the far end of the chamber swung wide and a wild-eyed messenger sprang into the room.

"The jeddak of jeddaks!" he cried. "Where is the jeddak of jeddaks? The city has fallen before the hordes from beyond the barrier, and but now the great gate of the palace itself has been forced and the warriors of the south are pouring into its sacred precincts.

"Where is Salensus Oll? He alone may revive the flagging courage of our warriors. He alone may save the day for Okar. Where is Salensus Oll?"

The nobles stepped back from about the dead body of their ruler, and one of them pointed to the grinning corpse.

The messenger staggered back in horror as though from a blow in the face.

"Then fly, nobles of Okar!" he cried, "for naught can save you. Hark! They come!"

As he spoke we heard the deep roar of angry men from the corridor without, and the clank of metal and the clang of swords.

Without another glance toward me, who had stood a spectator of the tragic scene, the nobles wheeled and fled from the apartment through another exit.

Almost immediately a force of yellow warriors appeared in the doorway through which the messenger had come. They were backing toward the apartment, stubbornly resisting the advance of a handful of red men who faced them and forced them slowly but inevitably back.

Above the heads of the contestants I could see from my elevated station upon the dais the face of my old friend Kantos Kan. He was leading the little party that had won its way into the very heart of the palace of Salensus Oll.

In an instant I saw that by attacking the Okarians from the rear I could so

quickly disorganize them that their further resistance would be short-lived, and with this idea in mind I sprang from the dais, casting a word of explanation to Dejah Thoris over my shoulder, though I did not turn to look at her.

With myself ever between her enemies and herself, and with Kantos Kan and his warriors winning to the apartment, there could be no danger to Dejah Thoris standing there alone beside the throne.

I wanted the men of Helium to see me and to know that their beloved princess was here, too, for I knew that this knowledge would inspire them to even greater deeds of valor than they had performed in the past, though great indeed must have been those which won for them a way into the almost impregnable palace of the tyrant of the north.

As I crossed the chamber to attack the Kadabrans from the rear a small doorway at my left opened, and, to my surprise, revealed the figures of Matai Shang, Father of Therns, and Phaidor, his daughter, peering into the room.

A quick glance about they took. Their eyes rested for a moment, wide in horror, upon the dead body of Salensus Oll, upon the blood that crimsoned the floor, upon the corpses of the nobles that had fallen thick before the throne, upon me, and upon the battling warriors at the other door.

They did not essay to enter the apartment, but scanned its every corner from where they stood, and then, when their eyes had sought its entire area, a look of fierce rage overspread the features of Matai Shang, and a cold and cunning smile touched the lips of Phaidor.

Then they were gone, but not before a taunting laugh was thrown directly in my face by the woman.

I did not understand then the meaning of Matai Shang's rage or Phaidor's pleasure, but that neither boded good for me, I could have sworn.

A moment later I was upon the backs of the yellow men, and as the red men of Helium saw me above the shoulders of their antagonists a great shout rang through the corridor, and for a moment drowned the noise of battle.

"For the Prince of Helium!" they cried. "For the Prince of Helium!" and, like hungry lions upon their prey, they fell once more upon the weakening warriors of the north.

The yellow men, cornered between two enemies, fought with the desperation that utter hopelessness often induces. Fought as I should have fought had I been in their stead, with the determination to take as many of my enemies with me when I died as lay within the power of my sword arm.

It was a glorious battle, but the end seemed inevitable, when presently from down the corridor behind the red men came a great body of reenforcing yellow warriors.

Now were the tables turned, and it was the men of Helium who seemed doomed to be ground between two millstones. All were compelled to turn to meet this new assault by a greatly superior force, so that to me was left the remnants of the yellow men within the throne room.

They kept me busy, too; so busy that I began to wonder if indeed I should ever be done with them. Slowly they pressed me back into the room, and when they had all passed in after me, one of them closed and bolted the door, effectually barring the way against the men of Kantos Kan.

It was a clever move, for it put me at the mercy of a dozen men within a chamber from which assistance was locked out, and it gave the red men in the corridor beyond no avenue of escape should their new antagonists press them too closely.

But I have faced heavier odds myself than were pitted against me that day, and I knew that Kantos Kan had battled his way from a hundred more dangerous traps than that in which he now was. So it was with no feelings of despair that I turned my attention to the business of the moment.

Constantly my thoughts reverted to Dejah Thoris, and I longed for the moment when, the fighting done, I could fold her in my arms, and hear once more the words of love which had been denied me for so many years.

During the fighting in the chamber I had not even a single chance to so much as steal a glance at her where she stood behind me beside the throne of the dead ruler. I wondered why she no longer urged me on with the strains of the martial hymn of Helium; but I did not need more than the knowledge that I was battling for her to bring out the best that is in me.

It would be wearisome to narrate the details of that bloody struggle; of how we fought from the doorway, the full length of the room to the very foot of the throne before the last of my antagonists fell with my blade piercing his heart.

And then, with a glad cry, I turned with outstretched arms to seize my princess, and as my lips smothered hers to reap the reward that would be thrice ample payment for the bloody encounters through which I had passed for her dear sake from the south pole to the north.

The glad cry died, frozen upon my lips; my arms dropped limp and lifeless to my sides; as one who reels beneath the burden of a mortal wound I staggered up the steps before the throne.

Dejah Thoris was gone.

CHAPTER XV.

REWARDS.

With the realization that Dejah Thoris was no longer within the throne-room came the belated recollection of the dark face that I had glimpsed peering from behind the draperies that backed the throne of Salensus Oll at the moment that I had first come so unexpectedly upon the strange scene being enacted within the chamber.

Why had the sight of that evil countenance not warned me to greater caution? Why had I permitted the rapid development of new situations to efface the recollection of that menacing danger? But, alas, vain regret would not erase the calamity that had befallen.

Once again had Dejah Thoris fallen into the clutches of that arch fiend, Thurid, the black dator of the First Born. Again was all my arduous labor gone for naught. Now I realized the cause of the rage that had been writ so large upon the features of Matai Shang, and the cruel pleasure that I had seen upon the face of Phaidor.

They had known or guessed the truth, and the hekkador of The Holy Therns, who had evidently come to the chamber in the hope of thwarting Salensus Oll in his contemplated perfidy against the high priest who coveted Dejah Thoris for himself, realized that Thurid had stolen the prize from beneath his very nose.

Phaidor's pleasure had been due to her realization of what this last cruel blow would mean to me, as well as to a partial satisfaction of her jealous hatred for the Princess of Helium.

My first thought was to look beyond the draperies at the back of the throne, for there it was that I had seen Thurid. With a single jerk I tore the priceless stuff from its fastenings, and there before me was revealed a narrow doorway behind the throne.

No question entered my mind but that here lay the opening of the avenue of escape which Thurid had followed, and had there been it would have been dissipated by the sight of a tiny, jeweled ornament which lay a few steps within the corridor beyond.

As I snatched up the bauble I saw that it bore the device of the Princess of Helium, and then pressing it to my lips I dashed madly along the winding way that led gently downward toward the lower galleries of the palace.

I had followed but a short distance when I came upon the room in which Solan formerly had held sway. His

dead body still lay where I had left it, nor was there any sign that another had passed through the room since I had been there; but I knew that two had done so—Thurid, the black dator, and Dejah Thoris.

For a moment I paused uncertain as to which of the several exits from the apartment would lead me upon the right path. I tried to recollect the directions which I had heard Thurid repeat to Solan, and at last, slowly, as though through a heavy fog, the memory of the words of the First Born came to me:

"Follow a corridor, passing three diverging corridors upon the right; then into the fourth right-hand corridor to where three corridors meet; here again follow to the right, hugging the left wall closely to avoid the pit. At the end of this corridor I shall come to a spiral runway which I must follow down instead of up; after that the way is along but a single branchless corridor."

And I recalled the exit at which he had pointed as he spoke.

It did not take me long to start upon that unknown way, nor did I go with caution, although I knew that there might be grave dangers before me.

Part of the way was black as sin, but for the most it was fairly well lighted. The stretch where I must hug the left wall to avoid the pits was darkest of them all, and I was nearly over the edge of the abyss before I knew that I was near the danger spot.

A narrow ledge, scarce a foot wide, was all that had been left to carry the initiated past that frightful cavity into which the unknowing must surely have toppled at the first step. But at last I had won safely beyond it, and then a feeble light made the balance of the way plain, until, at the end of the last corridor, I came suddenly out into the glare of day upon a field of snow and ice.

Clad for the warm atmosphere of the hot-house city of Kadabra, the sudden change to arctic frigidity was anything but pleasant; but the worst of it was that I knew I could not endure the bitter cold, almost naked as I was, and that I would perish before ever I could overtake Thurid and Dejah Thoris.

To be thus blocked by nature, who had had all the arts and wiles of cunning man pitted against him, seemed a cruel fate, and as I staggered back into the warmth of the tunnel's end I was as near hopelessness as I have ever been.

I had by no means given up my intention of continuing the pursuit, for if needs be I would go ahead though I perished ere ever I reached my goal, but if there were a safer way it were well worth the delay to attempt to discover it, that I might come again to the side of Dejah Thoris in fit condition to do battle for her.

Scarce had I returned to the tunnel than I stumbled over a portion of a fur garment that seemed fastened to the floor of the corridor close to the wall. In the darkness I could not see what held it, but by groping with my hands I discovered that it was wedged beneath the bottom of a closed door.

Pushing the portal aside, I found myself upon the threshold of a small chamber, the walls of which were lined with hooks from which depended suits of the complete outdoor apparel of the yellow men.

Situated as it was at the mouth of a tunnel leading from the palace, it was quite evident that this was the dressing-room used by the nobles leaving and entering the hot-house city, and that Thurid, having knowledge of it, had stopped here to outfit himself and Dejah Thoris before venturing into the bitter cold of the arctic world beyond.

In his haste he had dropped several garments upon the floor, and the telltale fur that had fallen partly within the corridor had proved the means of guiding me to the very spot he would least have wished me to have knowledge of.

It required but the matter of a few seconds to don the necessary orluk-skin clothing, with the heavy, fur-lined boots that are so essential a part of the garmenture of one who would successfully contend with the frozen trails and the icy winds of the bleak northland.

Once more I stepped beyond the tunnel's mouth to find the fresh tracks of Thurid and Dejah Thoris in the new-fallen snow. Now, at last, was my task an easy one, for though the going was rough in the extreme, I was no longer vexed by doubts as to the direction I should follow, or harassed by darkness or hidden dangers.

Through a snow-covered cañon the way led, up toward the summit of low hills. Beyond these it dipped again into another cañon, only to rise a quarter-mile farther on toward a pass which skirted the flank of a rocky hill.

I could see by the signs of those who had gone before that when Dejah Thoris had walked she had been continually holding back, and that the black man had been compelled to drag her. For other stretches only his footprints were visible, deep and close together in the heavy snow, and I knew from these signs that then he had been forced to carry her, and I could well imagine that she had fought him every step of the way.

As I came round the jutting promontory of the hill's shoulder I saw that which quickened my pulses and set my heart to beating high, for within a tiny basin between the crest of this hill and the next stood four people before the mouth of a great cave, and beside them upon the gleaming snow rested a flier which had evidently but just been dragged from its hiding-place.

The four were Dejah Thoris, Phaidor, Thurid, and Matai Shang. The two men were engaged in a heated argument—the Father of Therns threatening, while the black scoffed at him as he went about the work at which he was engaged.

As I crept toward them cautiously that I might come as near as possible before being discovered, I saw that finally the men appeared to have reached some sort of a compromise, for with Phaidor's assistance they both set about dragging the resisting Dejah Thoris to the flier's deck.

Here they made her fast, and then both again descended to the ground to complete the preparations for departure. Phaidor entered the small cabin upon the vessel's deck.

I had come to within a quarter of a mile of them when Matai Shang espied me. I saw him seize Thurid by the shoulder, wheeling him around in my direction as he pointed to where I was now plainly visible, for the moment that I knew I had been perceived I cast aside every attempt at stealth and broke into a mad race for the flier.

The two redoubled their efforts at the propeller at which they were working, and which very evidently was being replaced after having been removed for some purpose of repair.

They had the thing completed before I had covered half the distance that lay between me and them, and then both made a rush for the boarding-ladder.

Thurid was the first to reach it, and with the agility of a monkey clambered swiftly to the boat's deck, where a touch of the button controlling the buoyancy tanks sent the craft slowly upward, though not with the speed that marks the well-conditioned flier.

I was still some hundred yards away as I saw them rising from my grasp.

Back by the city of Kadabra lay a great fleet of mighty fliers—the ships of Helium and Ptarth that I had saved from destruction earlier in the day; but before ever I could reach them Thurid could easily make good his escape.

As I ran I saw Matai Shang clambering up the swaying, swinging ladder toward the deck, while above him leaned the evil face of the First Born. A trailing rope from the vessel's stern

put new hope in me, for if I could but reach it before it whipped too high above my head there was yet a chance to gain the deck by its slender aid.

That there was something radically wrong with the flier was evident from its lack of buoyancy, and the further fact that though Thurid had turned twice to the starting lever the boat still hung motionless in the air, except for a slight drifting with a low breeze that blew from the north.

Now Matai Shang was close to the gunwale. A long, clawlike hand was reaching up to grasp the metal rail.

Thurid leaned farther down toward his coconspirator.

Suddenly a raised dagger gleamed in the up-flung hand of the black. Down it drove toward the white face of the Father of Therns. With a loud shriek of fear the Holy Hekkador grasped frantically at that menacing arm.

I was almost to the trailing rope by now. The craft still was rising slowly, the while it drifted from me. Then I stumbled on the icy way, striking my head upon a rock as I fell sprawling but an arm's length from the rope, the end of which was now just leaving the ground.

With the blow upon my head came unconsciousness.

It could not have been more than a few seconds that I lay senseless there upon the northern ice, while all that was dearest to me drifted farther from my reach in the clutches of that black fiend, for when I opened my eyes Thurid and Matai Shang yet battled at the ladder's top, and the flier drifted but a hundred yards farther to the south—but the end of the trailing rope was now a good thirty feet above the ground.

Goaded to madness by the cruel misfortunes that had tripped me when success was almost within my grasp, I tore frantically across the intervening space, and just beneath the rope's dangling end I put my earthly muscles to the supreme test.

With a mighty, catlike bound I sprang upward toward that slender strand—the only avenue which yet remained that could carry me to my vanishing love.

A foot above its lowest end my fingers closed. Tightly as I clung I felt the rope slipping, slipping through my grasp. I tried to raise my free hand to take a second hold above my first, but the change of position that resulted caused me to slip more rapidly toward the rope's end.

Slowly I felt the tantalizing thing escaping me. In a moment all that I had gained would be lost—then my fingers reached a knot at the very end of the rope and slipped no more.

With a prayer of gratitude upon my lips I scrambled upward toward the boat's deck. I could not see Thurid and Matai Shang now, but I heard the sounds of conflict and thus knew that they still fought—the thern for his life and the black for the increased buoyancy that relief from the weight of even a single body would give the craft.

Should Matai Shang die before I reached the deck my chances of ever reaching it would be slender indeed, for the black dator need but cut the rope above me to be freed from me forever, for the vessel had drifted across the brink of a chasm into whose yawning depths my body would drop to be crushed to a shapeless pulp should Thurid reach the rope now.

At last my hand closed upon the ship's rail, and at that very instant a horrid shriek rang out below me that sent my blood cold and turned my horrified eyes downward to a shrieking, hurtling, twisting thing that shot downward into the awful chasm beneath me.

It was Matai Shang, Holy Hekkador, Father of Therns, gone to his last accounting.

Then my head came above the deck and I saw Thurid, dagger in hand, leaping toward me. He was opposite the forward end of the cabin, while I

was attempting to clamber aboard near the vessel's stern. But a few paces lay between us. No power on earth could raise me to that deck before the black would be upon me.

My end had come. I knew it; but had there been a doubt in my mind the nasty leer of triumph upon that wicked face would have convinced me. Beyond Thurid I could see my Dejah Thoris, wide-eyed and horrified, struggling at her bonds. That she should be forced to witness my awful death made my bitter fate seem doubly cruel.

I ceased my efforts to climb across the gunwale. Instead I took a firm grasp upon the rail with my left hand and drew my dagger.

I should at least die as I had lived—fighting.

As Thurid came opposite the cabin's doorway a new element projected itself into the grim tragedy of the air that was being enacted upon the deck of Matai Shang's disabled flier.

It was Phaidor.

With flushed face and disheveled hair, and eyes that betrayed the recent presence of mortal tears—above which this proud goddess had always held herself—she leaped to the deck directly before me.

In her hand was a long, slim dagger. I cast a last look upon my beloved princess, smiling, as men should who are about to die. Then I turned my face up toward Phaidor—waiting for the blow.

Never had I seen that beautiful face more beautiful than it was at that moment. It seemed incredible that one so lovely could yet harbor within her fair bosom a heart so cruel and relentless, and to-day there was a new expression in her wondrous eyes that I had never before seen there—an unfamiliar softness, and a look of suffering.

Thurid was beside her now—pushing past to reach me first, and then what happened happened so quickly that it was all over before I could realize the truth of it.

Phaidor's slim hand shot out to close upon the black's dagger wrist. Her right hand went high with its gleaming blade.

"That for Matai Shang!" she cried, and she buried her blade deep in the dator's breast. "That for the wrong you would have done Dejah Thoris!" and again the sharp steel sank into the bloody flesh.

"And that, and that, and that!" she shrieked, "for John Carter, Prince of Helium," and with each word her sharp point pierced the vile heart of the great villain. Then, with a vindictive shove she cast the body of the First Born from the deck to fall in awful silence after the body of his victim.

I had been so paralyzed by surprise that I had made no move to reach the deck during the awe-inspiring scene which I had just witnessed, and now I was to be still further amazed by her next act, for Phaidor extended her hand to me and assisted me to the deck, where I stood gazing at her in unconcealed and stupefied wonderment.

A wan smile touched her lips—it was not the cruel and haughty smile of the goddess with which I was familiar.

"You wonder, John Carter," she said, "what strange thing has wrought this change in me? I will tell you. It is love—love of you," and when I darkened my brows in disapproval of her words she raised an appealing hand.

"Wait," she said. "It is a different love from mine—it is the love of your princess, Dejah Thoris, for you that has taught me what true love may be—what it should be, and how far from real love was my selfish and jealous passion for you.

"Now I am different. Now could I love as Dejah Thoris loves, and so my only happiness can be to know that you and she are once more united, for in her alone can you find true happiness.

"But I am unhappy because of the

wickedness that I have wrought. I have many sins to expiate, and though I be deathless, life is all too short for the atonement.

"But there is another way, and if Phaidor, daughter of the Holy Hekkador of the Holy Therns, has sinned she has this day already made partial reparation, and lest you doubt the sincerity of her protestations and her avowal of a new love that embraces Dejah Thoris also, she will prove her sincerity in the only way that lies open—having saved you for another, Phaidor leaves you to her embraces."

With her last word she turned and leaped from the vessel's deck into the abyss below.

With a cry of horror I sprang forward in a vain attempt to save the life that for two years I would so gladly have seen extinguished. I was too late.

With tear-dimmed eyes I turned away that I might not see the awful sight beneath.

A momont later I had struck the bonds from Dejah Thoris, and as her dear arms went about my neck and her perfect lips pressed to mine I forgot the horrors that I had witnessed.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NEW RULER.

THE flier upon whose deck Dejah Thoris and I found ourselves after twelve long years of separation proved entirely useless. Her buoyancy tanks leaked badly. Her engine would not start. We were helpless there in mid-air above the arctic ice.

The craft had drifted across the chasm which held the corpses of Matai Shang, Thurid, and Phaidor, and now hung above a low hill. Opening the buoyancy escape valves I permitted her to come slowly to the ground, and as she touched Dejah Thoris and I stepped from her deck and, hand in hand, turned back across the frozen waste toward the city of Kadabra.

Through the tunnel that had led me in pursuit of them we passed, walking slowly, for we had much to say to one another.

She told me of that last terrible moment months before when the door of her prison cell within the Temple of the Sun was slowly closing between us. Of how Phaidor had sprung upon her with uplifted dagger, and of Thuvia's shriek as she had realized the foul intention of the thern goddess.

It had been that cry that had rung in my ears all the long, weary months that I had been left in cruel doubt as to my princess's fate; for I had not known that Thuvia had wrested the blade from the daughter of Matai Shang before it had touched either Dejah Thoris or herself.

She told me, too, of the awful eternity of her imprisonment. Of the cruel hatred of Phaidor, and the tender love of Thuvia, and of how even when despair was the darkest those two red girls had clung to the same hope and belief—that John Carter would find a way to release them.

Presently we came to the chamber of Solan. I had been proceeding without thought of caution, for I was sure that the city and the palace were both in the hands of my friends by this time.

And so it was that I bolted into the chamber full into the midst of a dozen nobles of the court of Salensus Oll. They were passing through on their way to the outside world along the corridors we had just traversed.

At sight of us they halted in their tracks, and then an ugly smile overspread the features of their leader.

"The author of all our misfortunes!" he cried, pointing at me. "We shall have the satisfaction of a partial vengeance at least when we leave behind us here the dead and mutilated corpses of the Prince and Princess of Helium.

"When they find them," he went on, jerking his thumb upward toward the palace above, "they will realize that

the vengeance of the yellow man costs his enemies dear. Prepare to die, John Carter, but that your end may be the more bitter, know that I may change my intention as to meting a merciful death to your princess—possibly she shall be preserved as a plaything for my nobles."

I stood close to the instrument-covered wall—Dejah Thoris at my side. She looked up at me wonderingly as the warriors advanced upon us with drawn swords, for mine still hung within its scabbard at my side, and there was a smile upon my lips.

The yellow nobles, too, looked in surprise, and then as I made no move to draw they hesitated, fearing a ruse; but their leader urged them on. When they had come almost within sword's reach of me I raised my hand and laid it upon the polished surface of a great lever, and then, still smiling grimly, I looked my enemy full in the face.

As one they came to a sudden stop, casting affrighted glances at me and at one another.

"Stop!" shrieked their leader. "You dream not what you do!"

"Right you are," I replied. "John Carter does not dream. He knows—knows that should one of you take another step toward Dejah Thoris, Princess of Helium, I pull this lever wide, and she and I shall die together; but we shall not die alone."

The nobles shrank back, whispering together for a few moments. At last their leader turned to me.

"Go your way, John Carter," he said, "and we shall go ours."

"Prisoners do not go their own way," I answered, "and you are prisoners—prisoners of the Prince of Helium."

Before they could make answer a door upon the opposite side of the apartment opened and a score of yellow men poured into the apartment. For an instant the nobles looked relieved, and then as their eyes fell upon the leader of the new party their faces fell, for he was Talu, rebel Prince of Marentina, and they knew that they could look for neither aid or mercy at his hands.

Talu took in the situation at a glance, smiling.

"Well done, John Carter," he cried. "You turn their own mighty power against them. Fortunate for Okar is it that you were here to prevent their escape, for these be the greatest villains north of the ice-barrier, and this one"—pointing to the leader of the party—"would have made himself jeddak of jeddaks in the place of the dead Salensus Oll. Then indeed would we have had a more villainous ruler than the hated tyrant who fell before your sword."

The Okarian nobles now submitted to arrest, since nothing but death faced them should they resist, and, escorted by the warriors of Talu, we made our way to the great audience chamber that had been Salensus Oll's. Here was a vast concourse of warriors.

Red men from Helium and Ptarth, yellow men of the north, rubbing elbows with the blacks of the First Born who had come under my friend Xodar to help in the search for me and my princess. There were savage, green warriors from the dead-sea bottoms of the south, and a handful of white-skinned therns who had renounced their religion and sworn allegiance to Xodar.

There were Tardos Mors and Mors Kajak, and tall and mighty in his gorgeous warrior trappings, Carthoris, my son. These three fell upon Dejah Thoris as we entered the apartment, and though the lives and training of royal Martians tend not toward vulgar demonstrations, I thought that they would suffocate her with their embraces.

And there were Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark, and Kantos Kan, my old-time friends, and leaping and tearing at my harness in the exuberance of his great love was dear old Woola—frantic mad with happiness.

Long and loud was the cheering that burst forth at sight of us; deafening was the din of ringing metal as the veteran warriors of every Martian clime clashed their blades together on high in token of success and victory, but as I passed among the throng of saluting nobles and warriors, jeds and jeddaks, my heart still was heavy, for there were two faces missing that I would have given much to have seen there—Thuvan Dihn and Thuvia of Ptarth were not to be found in the great chamber.

I made inquiries concerning them among men of every nation, and at last from one of the yellow prisoners of war I learned that they had been apprehended by an officer of the palace as they sought to reach the Pit of Plenty while I lay imprisoned there.

I did not need to ask to know what had sent them thither—the courageous jeddak and his loyal daughter. My informer said that they lay now in one of the many buried dungeons of the palace where they had been placed pending a decision as to their fate by the tyrant of the north.

A moment later searching parties were scouring the ancient pile in search of them, and my cup of happiness was full when I saw them being escorted into the room by a cheering guard of honor.

Thuvia's first act was to rush to the side of Dejah Thoris, and I needed no better proof of the love these two bore for one another than the sincerity with which they embraced.

Looking down upon that crowded chamber stood the silent and empty throne of Okar.

Of all the strange scenes it must have witnessed since that long dead age that had first seen a jeddak of jeddaks take his seat upon it, none might compare with that upon which it now looked down, and as I pondered the past and future of that long-buried race of black-bearded yellow men I thought that I saw a brighter and more useful existence for them among the great family of friendly nations that now stretched from the south pole almost to their very doors.

Twenty-two years before I had been cast, naked and a stranger, into this strange and savage world. The hand of every race and nation was raised in continual strife and warring against the men of every other land and color.

To-day, by the might of my sword and the loyalty of the friends my sword had made me, black man and white, red man and green, rubbed shoulders in peace and good fellowship. All the nations of Barsoom were not yet as one, but a great stride forward toward that goal had been taken, and now if I could but cement the fierce yellow race into this sodality of nations I should feel that I had rounded out a great life-work, and repaid to Mars at least a portion of the immense debt of gratitude I owed her for having given me my Dejah Thoris.

And as I thought I saw but one way, and a single man who could insure the success of my hopes. As is ever the way with me, I acted then as I always act—without deliberation and without consultation.

Those who do not like my plans and my ways of promoting them have always their swords at their sides wherewith to back up their disapproval; but now there seemed to be no dissenting voice, as, grasping Talu by the arm, I sprang to the throne that had once been Salensus Oll's.

"Warriors of Barsoom," I cried, "Kadabra has fallen, and with her the hateful tyrant of the north; but the integrity of Okar must be preserved. The red men are ruled by red jeddaks, the green warriors of the ancient seas acknowledge none but a green ruler, the First Born of the South Pole take their law from black Xodar; nor would it be to the interests of either yellow or red man were a red jeddak to sit upon the throne of Okar.

"There be but one warrior best fitted for the ancient and mighty title of Jeddak of Jeddaks of the North. Men

of Okar, raise your swords to your new ruler—Talu, the rebel Prince of Marentina!"

And then a great cry of rejoicing rose among the free men of Marentina and the Kadabran prisoners, for all had thought that the red men would retain that which they had taken by force of arms, for such had been the way upon Barsoom, and that they should be ruled henceforth by an alien jeddak.

The victorious warriors that had followed Carthoris joined in the mad demonstration, and amidst the wild confusion and the tumult and the cheering Dejah Thoris and I passed out into the gorgeous Garden of the Jeddaks that graces the inner courtyard of the palace at Kadabra.

At our heels walked Woola, and upon a carved seat of wondrous beauty beneath a bower of purple blooms we saw two who had preceded us—Thuvia of Ptarth and Carthoris of Helium.

The handsome head of the handsome youth was bent low above the beautiful face of his companion. I looked at Dejah Thoris, smiling, and as I drew her close to me I whispered: "Why not?"

Indeed, why not? What matter ages in this world of perpetual youth?

We remained at Kadabra, the guests of Talu, until after his formal induction into office, and then, upon the great fleet which I had been so fortunate to preserve from destruction, we sailed south across the ice-barrier; but not before we had witnessed the total demolition of the grim Guardian of the North under orders of the new jeddak of jeddaks.

"Henceforth," he said, as the work was completed, "the fleets of the red men and the black are free to come and go across the ice-barrier as over their own lands.

"The Carrion Caves shall be cleansed, that the green men may find an easy way to the land of the yellow, and the hunting of the sacred apt shall be the sport of my nobles until no single specimen of that hideous creature roams the frozen north."

We bade our yellow friends farewell with real regret, as we set sail for Ptarth. There we remained, the guests of Thuvan Dihn, for a month; and I could see that Carthoris would have remained forever had he not been a Prince of Helium.

Above the mighty forests of Kaol we hovered until word from Kulan Tith brought us to his single landing-tower, where all day and half a night the vessels disembarked their crews. At the city of Kaol we visited, cementing the new ties that had been formed between Kaol and Helium, and then one long-to-be-remembered day we sighted the tall, thin towers of the twin cities of Helium.

The people had long been preparing for our coming. The sky was gorgeous with gaily trimmed fliers. Every roof within both cities was spread with costly silks and tapestries.

Gold and jewels were scattered over roof and street and plaza, so that the two cities seemed ablaze with the fires of the hearts of the magnificent stones and burnished metal that reflected the brilliant sunlight, changing it into countless glorious hues.

At last, after twelve years, the royal family of Helium was reunited in their own mighty city, surrounded by joy-mad millions before the palace gates. Women and children and mighty warriors wept in gratitude for the fate that had restored their beloved Tardos Mors and the divine princess whom the whole nation idolized. Nor did any of us who had been upon that expedition of danger and glory lack for plaudits.

That night a messenger came to me as I sat with Dejah Thoris and Carthoris upon the roof of my city palace, where we had long since caused a lovely garden to be made that we three might find seclusion and quiet happiness among ourselves, far from the pomp and ceremony of court, to summon us to the Temple of Reward—

" where one is to be judged this night," the summons concluded.

I racked my brain to try and determine what important case there might be pending which could call the royal family from their palaces on the eve of their return to Helium after years of absence; but when the jeddak summons no man delays.

As our flier touched the landing stage at the temple's top we saw countless other craft arriving and departing. In the streets below a great multitude surged toward the great gates of the temple.

Slowly there came to me the recollection of the deferred doom that awaited me since that time I had been tried here in the Temple by Zat Arras for the sin of returning from the Valley Dor and the Lost Sea of Korus.

Could it be possible that the strict sense of justice which dominates the men of Mars had caused them to overlook the great good that had come out of my heresy? Had they so soon forgotten the debt they owed me in releasing them from the bondage of their horrid belief? Could they ignore the fact that to me, and me alone, was due the rescue of Carthoris, of Dejah Thoris, of Mors Kajak, of Tardos Mors?

I could not believe it, and yet for what other purpose could I have been summoned to the Temple of Reward immediately upon the return of Tardos Mors to his throne?

My first surprise as I entered the temple and approached the Throne of Righteousness was to note the men who sat there as judges. There was Kulan Tith, Jeddak of Kaol, whom we had but just left within his own palace a few days since; there was Thuvan Dihn, Jeddak of Ptarth—how came he to Helium as soon as we?

There was Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark, and Xodar, Jeddah of the First Born; there was Talu, Jeddak of Jeddaks of the North, whom I could have sworn was still in his ice-bound hothouse city beyond the northern barrier, and among them sat Tardos Mors and Mors Kajak, with enough lesser jeds and jeddaks to make up the thirty-one who must sit in judgment upon their fellow man.

A right royal tribune indeed, and such a one, I warrant, as never before sat together during all the history of ancient Mars.

As I entered silence fell upon the great concourse of people that packed the auditorium. Then Tardos Mors arose.

" John Carter," he said in his deep, martial voice, " take your place upon the Pedestal of Truth, for you are to be tried by a fair and impartial tribunal of your fellow men."

With level eye and high-held head I did as he bade, and as I glanced about that circle of faces that a moment before I could have sworn contained the best friends I had upon Barsoom, I saw no single friendly glance—only stern, uncompromising judges, there to do their duty as they saw it without fear or favor.

A clerk rose and from a great book read a long list of the more notable deeds that I had thought to my credit, covering a long period of twenty-two years since first I had stepped the ocher sea-bottom beside the incubator of the Tharks. With the others he read of all that I had done within the circle of the Ots Mountains where the Holy Therns and the First Born had held sway.

It is the way upon Barsoom to recite a man's virtues with his sins when he is come to trial, and so I was not surprised that all that was to my credit should be read there to my judges—who knew it all by heart—even down to the present moment. When the reading had ceased Tardos Mors arose.

" Most righteous judges," he exclaimed, " you have heard recited all that is known of John Carter, Prince of Helium—the good with the bad and the bad with the good. What is your judgment? "

Then Tars Tarkas came slowly to

his feet, unfolding all his mighty, towering height until he loomed, a green-bronze statue, far above us all. He turned a baleful eye upon me—he, Tars Tarkas, with whom I had fought through countless battles.

I could have wept had I not been so mad with rage that I almost whipped my sword out and had at them all upon the spot.

"Judges," he said, "there can be but one verdict. No longer may John Carter be Prince of Helium"—he paused—"but instead let him be Jeddak of Jeddaks, Warlord of Barsoom!"

As the thirty-one judges sprang to their feet with drawn and upraised swords in unanimous concurrence in the verdict the storm broke throughout the length and breadth and height of that mighty building until I thought the roof would fall from the thunder of the mad shouting.

Now, at last, I saw the grim humor of the method they had adopted to do me this great honor, but that there was any hoax in the reality of the title they had conferred upon me was readily disproved by the sincerity of the congratulations that were heaped upon me by the judges first and then the nobles.

Presently fifty of the mightiest nobles of the greatest courts of Mars marched down the broad Aisle of Hope bearing a splendid car upon their shoulders, and as the people saw who sat within, the cheers that had rung out for me paled into insignificance beside those which thundered through the vast edifice now, for she whom the nobles carried was Dejah Thoris, beloved Princess of Helium.

Straight to the Throne of Righteousness they bore her, and there Tardos Mors assisted her from the car, leading her forward to my side.

"Let a world's most beautiful woman share the honor of her husband," he said.

Before them all I drew my wife close to me and kissed her.

(The End.)

LOVE CANNOT DIE.

By Robert Southey.

THEY sin who tell that love can die:
With life all other passions fly,
All others are but vanity.
In heaven ambition cannot dwell,
Nor avarice in the vaults of hell:
Earthly these passions, as of earth,
They perish where they have their birth.
But love is indestructible;
Its holy flame forever burneth;
From heaven it came, to heaven returneth.
Too oft on earth a troubled guest,
At times deceived, at times oppressed:
It is here tried and purified,
And hath in heaven its perfect rest;
It soweth here with toil and care,
But the harvest-time of love is there.
Oh! when a mother meets on high
The babe she lost in infancy,
Hath she not then for pains and fears,
The day of woe, the anxious night,
For all her sorrow, all her tears,
An overpayment of delight?

"Caught Out"

By **Fred C. Smale**

MR. ANDREW McCRAE, the news editor of the *Morning Glow*, frowned thoughtfully at the slip of paper before him and took the telephone receiver from its stand.

"Mr. Miller in the office?" he asked sharply. "Send him up."

Almost before he had replaced the instrument, the door opened and there entered a clean-shaven, swarthy-complexioned man of about two and thirty, with aquiline features and bright, restless eyes. His hair, which he wore rather long and parted in the middle, was jet-black and hung straight, as though he had just emerged from a bath.

Bat Miller was an American. One knew that as soon as he opened his mouth. In the office they sometimes called him "The Sioux," and there was undoubtedly Indian blood in his veins. He now stood silently watching his chief.

"Bat, here's a job for you," said the great man. "I think you'll like it."

He spoke as though it was not a matter of great moment whether Bat liked it or not. He had to do it, anyway.

The American took the slip of paper tendered to him and read what was on it, apparently at a glance. It was a matter of common knowledge that Bat Miller could walk into a room and, after one swift look round, go away and write an absolutely complete inventory of its contents. He returned the paper.

"Case of skipped with the dough," said he laconically.

Mr. McCrae frowned.

He rather objected to his star reporter's free-and-easy Americanisms, but Bat was a valuable man, and his eccentricities had to be condoned.

"Yes; this Mr. Ralph Freemantle, secretary of the Weizerboom Cycle Company, has apparently absconded with a good share of their money," he returned with a slight severity of tone which was quite lost upon Bat. "I don't expect you to find him. He is probably half-way across Europe by this time. You see, he has had twenty-four hours' start.

"But I want you to get the details. How much he has taken—how he got in as secretary; for I may tell you the police suspect him to be what I sup-

pose you would call a 'swell crook'; and there's a woman in it somewhere, of course." Mr. McCrae was a bachelor and a misogynist.

"Get some sort of story here by midnight at the latest. It is eight now. You have four hours. I'll hold half a column for you—all I can spare."

Bat considered for a moment.

"I suppose it's a sure thing that the guy has flitted?" he asked.

Mr. McCrae tapped the paper impatiently.

"Doesn't this say the police have been hunting him since midday?" he retorted.

Bat nodded.

"I'll pull out right away," said he.

"No; I don't want that paper. I've got it all in my dome."

Mr. McCrae's face relaxed for a moment.

"There, now," he mused; "any of the other boys would be whereing and whoing me crazy before he got off the mark. I will say that for Bat; he is quick on the uptake. He'll fill that half-column, all right. Maybe I'd better make it three-quarters."

And he proceeded to cut down a two-thousand word report of a fire—which an overenthusiastic correspondent had sent up from the provinces—to a three-line paragraph.

Bat Miller at once made his way to the premises of the Weizerboom Cycle Company, in Holborn, and presented his card as representative of the *Morning Glow*. A dried-up little man with a worried expression received him.

"What! Another of you?" he exclaimed irritably, rumpling his scanty hair. "Lord! there is nothing fresh to tell, beyond that the deficit seems rather bigger than was anticipated—nearer four thousand than three, the figure we put it at first. There's a man here from Hearder & Dean, the accountants, going through the books now."

"How's he got it—cash?" asked Bat.

"Drew the whole lot from the bank—Universal Deposit—Clapham Branch—yesterday morning. Altered a check after it had been signed by one of the directors and myself. He wrote the check itself originally, so it was easy for him."

"But he couldn't have taken it all in coin."

The manager made a grimace.

"Oh, but he did! Had a taxicab waiting. Preached them up some yarn about a big sum wanted for extra wages at our works in Birmingham. We have had occasion to draw fairly large sums in coin before now, you see, though not quite as much as that, and it seemed O. K. to the bank people.

"Besides, there was the check, genuine enough. It took them half an hour to get it together, and the fellow waited as calm as a cucumber, barring he said he hadn't much time to catch the train."

"Got a picture of him?" inquired Bat.

The manager laughed grimly.

"His drawer was full of 'em," he replied. "The *Dawn* people have had one; here's one for you."

Bat Miller scrutinized the portrait. It represented a man of apparently about thirty, with clear-cut features and dark curly hair carefully waved over the forehead.

"Very indiscreet of him to leave these things round," commented the American. "Looks like some sort of stage guy."

"Oh, he's all that! Great man at comic songs and so on. I dare say that's what brought him down, getting in with a sporty set; no good to any young man, that sort of thing."

"True," said Bat gravely. He himself was as rank a Bohemian as existed in London. "But I understand that the police believe him to be a well-known crook."

The manager snorted contemptuously.

"The police!" he exclaimed. "I dare say! They must say something.

His references were of the best, confound him!"

"Where is his little nest, anyway?" asked Bat. "He didn't live here on the premises, I take it."

"Maythorn Villa, Lombardy Road, Lee," was the reply. "But that has been overhauled. You'll only find his housekeeper there waiting for about three months' back salary. I guess she'll have to wait."

"You've been there?"

"With the police, this morning," replied the manager, who was beginning to show a querulous impatience.

"And there is no clue to this Freemantle's whereabouts?"

"None whatever, and now you really must excuse me. I have told you all I know. Oh, yes; take the photo by all means. It may help to track the rascal, if your people publish it."

Bat carefully placed the photograph in his pocketbook.

"Thanks," said he pleasantly. "I hope the crook'll get pinched with the goods on him, or within calling distance, at any rate. Good night."

"Good night," replied the other absently.

Bat slowly descended the stairs.

"Lee," he muttered—"that's south side. I guess I'll go there, though I dare say that little runt up-stairs is right; there won't be anything in it. Still—who knows!"

He was fortunate enough to catch a train at Cannon Street immediately, and after half an hour's run alighted at the high and windy station of Lee. He found Maythorn Villa to be a semi-detached residence, built of dingy white brick; one of a couple of dozen, all exactly alike, overlooking some nursery-gardens. A small terrier barked noisily as he opened the gate.

"Didn't take his pup with him, anyway," muttered Bat.

He rang the bell and glanced round speculatively. He knew that even modest little semidetached houses within half an hour's ride of the city were not to be had for nothing. He himself had to be content with a couple of rooms in the north of London. The shrubbery was well kept, too, and by the light of a lamp just outside the gate he saw that the drive had been newly graveled.

The door opened and an elderly woman stood regarding him inquiringly through her spectacles. She was soberly attired in a dress of some dark material with a white cap bearing a touch of heliotrope on one side. This was the housekeeper, no doubt. But Miller raised his hat.

"This is Mr. Freemantle's, I believe?" said he.

"Yes, sir; but he is not in now."

"No, so I understand," replied Bat dryly. "You will see by this that I am a representative of the *Morning Glow* newspaper."

The woman took the card. Her hand trembled and she spoke agitatedly.

"Yes. Of course you know what has happened. Oh, sir, it is a dreadful thing! I—I—"

Unable to say more, she turned away with a little sob.

Bat knit his brows. He hated to see women cry.

"May I come in?" he said quietly. "I promise not to trouble you more than is absolutely necessary."

The housekeeper recovered herself and turned to him again.

"Excuse me, sir," she said apologetically. "I have known Mr. Freemantle from a child. I nursed him as a baby, and I feel this very deeply indeed. Come in if you must, but assure you I can tell you nothing beyond what I suppose you know already."

She led Bat into a drawing-room furnished with lavish taste, not to say extravagance. Photographs of various stage characters occupied a good deal of space on the walls, but there were many pictures which Bat's quick eye told him were of considerable value.

Though the room was crowded with

costly knickknacks, he observed that the top of the piano was clear of ornaments—a fact which showed that musical enthusiasm had reigned supreme. A bright fire glowed in the grate.

"I keep it lighted, sir," said the woman with a pathetic little break in her voice, "in case he should come back. Perhaps it is all a mistake, after all! Who knows? I cannot believe it of him yet."

Bat shook his head as he sat down in one of the huge easy chairs, while the housekeeper took a stiff-backed one and smoothed out her lavender skirt in front of her.

"I am afraid there is small chance of that," said he. "You see, he cashed a check for an amount far beyond what it was originally made out for. Unhappily the thing is clear enough."

The woman nodded sadly.

"Ah, yes, the police told me," she replied, "when they came and searched the house this afternoon. Of course I don't understand much about that. I never interested myself in his business affairs. I only knew he seemed to be doing well."

"Yes," returned Bat, glancing round; "he doesn't seem to have been living in what you may call penury. He occupied this house alone?"

"Yes—besides myself and a servant girl."

"Any relatives?"

"He has no one in the world. Both his parents died when he was very young. I have lived with him for nearly seven years—six in Birmingham and the remainder here. We had only been here nine months."

Bat questioned her further and she answered freely. Her own name was Gates—Mrs. Gates. Her husband had been an engine-driver and had been killed in an accident eight years before. Mr. Freemantle appeared to have lived a comfortable bachelor-life of quite a normal kind.

An occasional trip to Brighton or Scarborough, with two or three jaunts farther afield, to Paris, Brussels, and one summer to Switzerland, had formed his only lengthy absences.

He was very fond of theatergoing, and had at one time spoken of going on the regular stage himself. He belonged to two amateur societies—one solely dramatic and the other operatic, for he had a very good singing-voice.

Bat Miller's eyes roamed round the room.

"I suppose these are some of him in various characters," said he.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Gates; but she seemed disinclined to talk further of her master's stage experiences; and, from the slightly disapproving tone in which she spoke of them, Bat suspected her of Puritanical tendencies.

"Well, I am very much obliged to you, ma'am," said he. "I have taken up considerable time, and you ought to be paid for it. It isn't as though I had an absolute right."

He placed half a sovereign on the little ormolu table at his elbow. Mrs. Gates raised her hand deprecatingly.

"Oh, it isn't my money," said Bat laughingly. "Our people like to pay for their stuff, you know."

The woman sighed.

"It is very kind of you, sir," she said: "and I will not deny that it is very acceptable to me. I am sure I don't know what I shall do now," and she choked back another sob.

"Oh, but all this will be sold up, of course," said Bat, indicating the luxurious surroundings; "and if I know anything, it will go far toward making good what has been taken, unless—" Bat added as a sudden thought struck him.

Mrs. Gates shook her head.

"It's all hired. Except the photographs, of course—and the people are coming to fetch it away in the morning. They would have done so, anyway. There has never been anything paid beyond the first instalment."

"Phew!" whistled Bat. "I might have guessed that. He seems rather a versatile sort of crook, this—"

He checked himself suddenly at the

look of pain on his companion's face and looked at his watch.

"There is no train back to the city for over an hour," said he. "I'd like to write up my stuff here if I may. That waiting-room up at the depot is no boudoir. It's warmer here."

"Certainly, sir," said Mrs. Gates; though Bat thought he detected a certain note of reluctance.

"Thank you," said he. "I'll be no trouble—just a couple of square feet of table room, that's all I want."

As the housekeeper turned to leave the room her skirt caught in a little table and a vase standing thereon toppled over.

She caught it deftly and, murmuring something apologetic, moved the whole affair to a corner.

Bat Miller stiffened suddenly and drew in his breath with a half-smothered gasp. Then he recovered himself with lightninglike rapidity, though his eyes glittered behind the half-closed lids.

"By the way, I'll want to step down to the post-office to send my people a wire," said he.

"Very well, sir; it is quite near. I will leave the door ajar, so that you can come right in on your return."

"Just so—many thanks," replied Bat, apparently deep in his note-book.

The woman left the room Bat closed his book with a snap and, first seeing that the door was closed, walked round the room with his peculiar catlike tread, scrutinizing the portraits on the wall. Then he drew out the photograph he had procured in Holburn and gazed at it for some moments.

"Sure—it's a cinch," he murmured.

His eyes were brighter than ever and his rather wide mouth set in a straight line.

He opened the door and left the room with a swift, noiseless movement. As he did so he caught sight of a feminine form vanishing through another door.

"So the help hasn't left the sinking ship, either," he muttered. "I wonder—old McCrae may be right—"

He walked to the post-office deep in thought, though his senses were on the alert for what happened round him, and he knew that he was not being followed. No one ever did that unknown to Bat Miller himself.

"Hold full column—good story," he wired the *Glow*. Then he sent another telegram elsewhere of a somewhat more urgent character, the wording of which made the girl look up at him curiously when she had read it.

Bat held up an admonitory forefinger. "Not a word to anybody," said he, with playful severity.

The girl tossed her head. "I know my duties," she retorted.

"I guess you do," said Bat calmly. "Send 'em by the quick wire, Molly—there's a peach."

On his return he found the front door half open. Bat grinned.

"Bluff's a good policy sometimes," he said softly. "But I'll make sure. I've come back, Mrs. Gates!" he sung out.

"All right, sir; I heard you."

"You bet," muttered Bat.

"My watch has gone wrong," he continued. "The blamed thing has stopped dead—heart, I guess. Will you kindly tell me when it is half past nine?"

"Certainly, sir."

Mrs. Gates had come into the hall and was placidly regarding him through her glasses, which glowed blood-red in the light of the hall-lamp.

"By the way," said Bat, "I'm sorry to be a nuisance, but would you mind letting your help bring me a cup of coffee and a couple of biscuits. I haven't had anything to eat since two o'clock."

The housekeeper frowned slightly.

"Help?" she said interrogatively.

Bat laughed.

"Your servant, I mean," he explained. "We call them 'helps' in the States. I'm American, you know, and haven't quite learned the British language yet."

Mrs. Gates's face did not relax.

"The girl has left," she observed; "but I will bring you what you require with pleasure."

"Left, has she?" exclaimed Bat. "That's rough on you. Well, if you will be so kind."

He passed into the drawing-room.

"I oughtn't to have let on," he mused. "That bit of josh of mine might easily ruin everything. Bat, you're some idiot."

Mrs. Gates brought his coffee and biscuits, but her manner had changed, and Bat cursed himself fluently under his breath.

Left to himself, he carefully poured the coffee into the pot of a tall palm which adorned one corner of the room.

"I'm not taking any chances in the doping line," he muttered.

For half an hour he wrote steadily, consulting the watch he had libeled at frequent intervals.

At last there came a tap at the door.

Bat chuckled softly.

"Ten minutes before time," he said to himself. "No overdoing the hospitality stunt. Well, I reckon I've made allowance."

"Come in!" he cried, and as he spoke he carefully drew his loose papers over something on the table before him.

The housekeeper stood in the doorway.

"Half past nine, sir," she said respectfully.

"Already?" cried Bat. "Well, I'm about through. Come in, ma'am, for a minute, will you? There are just one or two more points I'd like to ask about."

Mrs. Gates looked at him strangely and advanced into the room with evident hesitation. Bat rose and, gliding behind her, closed the door. He also turned the key and withdrew it.

So rapid were his movements that he was back again with the table between them ere Mrs. Gates could speak. But her quick ear had caught the noise of the key, slight as it had been.

"What are you doing?" she cried sharply, and Bat noted a sudden change in her voice. He eyed her with a quizzical expression.

"Sonny, the jig's up," said he quietly.

Mrs. Gates's face paled and her figure stiffened.

"What—what do you mean?" she replied in a voice strangely hoarse and unsteady. "Who are you—a robber?"

Bat smiled and shook his head.

"Oh, you Willie!" said he.

"It won't do! I'm on to you! Do you get me? Take off that gray lid of yours and smile—no, you don't, you rattler!"

The housekeeper, livid with rage and desperation, had seized a chair and held it high in the air. In another moment it would have crashed down on Bat's head, but he swept his papers aside and raised the revolver which he had ready.

"Drop the furniture!" he said sharply. "It's on the hire system, and you've no right to smash it."

The chair was lowered, and two smoldering eyes glared at him in impotent fury.

"That's right," said Bat genially. "Don't let's have a rough house. You see, it's no good. I have wired the police and a couple of cops are about due—now, then, you fool!"

At the mention of police his captive had made for the door and was banging at it frantically with his fists.

"Leonie—Leonie—the police are here—save yourself!" he cried.

There was no attempt at the mellow contralto voice now, and a manly barytone carried the words throughout the house.

"Oh, Leonie, is it?" said Bat. "Well, I'm afraid Leonie's got the lemon this time. Ah—yes, I thought so."

A tigerish scream rang out, mingled with the gruff voices of men.

"They're roping Leonie," commented Bat Miller. "Now, they'll add you to the collection—ah, would you?"

Apparently maddened by the sound

of the woman's voice, the disguised man sprang at his captor and tried to wrest his revolver from him, but Bat Miller's muscles were like whipcord.

In a moment the frenzied man lay dazedly on his back, the gray wig awry, disclosing a bullet-head of close-cropped black hair beneath.

"Now, that's too bad," said Bat regretfully. "I wanted to show you up in full canonicals. If you hadn't got peeved I reckon we'd have had some fun. I'd have introduced you to the sleuths as *Charley's Aunt* from Dudville—ha, here we are!"

He broke off as a thunderous knock came at the door.

Leaving his prisoner on the floor with a numbed arm, Bat thrust in the key and threw open the door, admitting two burly but rather ruffled-looking detectives, one of whom had a handkerchief roughly tied round his hand.

Bat waved his hand airily.

"Gentlemen," said he, "allow me to present you to Mr. Ralph Freemantle in his star part, the old lady of the Grange. He will now take a call. I don't think he'll give you any Swedish exercises. I believe I shook him up some just now."

The figure on the floor looked comical enough, in spite of the bloodshot eyes which shot baleful glances up at them; but the men did not smile.

"He'd better come quiet," said the one with the wounded hand grimly, "or I'll feel inclined to pay him back for the trouble that tiger-cat of a woman of his gave us. She nearly bit my hand in two."

"But you didn't let her slip?" asked Bat.

"Constable has her all right below, sir, with the bracelets on."

"Ah!" sighed Bat, "that's no way to treat a lady; but I suppose you'll say ladies don't make meals off policemen's hands. You've a couple of taxis, have you? Well, I'll just pinch a ride on one. May as well finish up a pleasant evening in style."

"You see," said Bat Miller, as he sat in the office, later on, smoking a seven-inch Havana, "I never got wise until our sport caught that flower-jug so neat. No woman could have done it just like that.

"Then, once being on the track, the photographs did the rest. He was a fool to leave them about. That's the way with all these smart crooks that always slip a cog sooner or later, and being something of a good-looker, vanity was his rock. That wasn't a bad idea to make the piano the treasure-chest, though you'd look for notes rather than bullion in a thing of that sort."

Bat paused for the expected laugh, but his long-drawn face was as immovable as stone, and nobody showed appreciation of his joke. Bat sighed softly.

"That double-identity stunt was a cute game enough, too," he continued. "Whoever would have guessed that the old dame who kept house there all those months was the bright-eyed boy himself? If I hadn't tumbled, they would have cleared out next day, cash and all, with no more notice being taken than if they were two mud-spots on a wheel.

"Nobody ever remarked upon the fact that Freemantle and his 'old-folks-at-home' dame were never on view at the same time. That Leonie was some peach, too; though after the rough and tumble with the sleuths she looked more like Calamity Jane from 'way back. A biter from Biteville! Gee! I'm glad I only had to deal with the male bird, though he'd have put me out o' commission if I'd given him half a chance.

"Oh, yes, boys; the Weizerboom people have promised to decorate me some. I'll ask you all to supper at one of the big grub-emporiums up West when it comes off. But what galls me is that old Mac only gave me a column.

"Why, with a bunch of those photos to light up the sermon, I could have filled half a page at least."

The Madness of Method

by Frank Leon Smith

WE sat on the window-sill, Bob, my roommate, George Tyler, an artist friend, and I, watching the paper-hangers pack up their kits.

We had learned by previous experience that it is wise to watch paper-hangers perform this operation. Collector's craze is not peculiar to museum curators.

After they had departed we continued to sit and to cogitate.

Our studio was a sight for the wanton and the malicious. To be sure, the ceilings were unbelievably white and the walls reflected the art of the designer, the craft of the paper-maker, and the cunning of the hanger. But the floors—plural; we had three rooms and a bath—were spattered with paint and calcimine, and scraps of pasty wall-paper clung tenaciously to the boards.

In the center of the rooms were heaped our belongings: chairs, carved—initials and dates—tables, easels, photograph files, shelves, cabinets, books—some with covers—pictures, and the various what-not that two young men with more time than money gather about themselves.

Bob and I were confronted by a monstrous problem—we didn't know just where or how to begin the task of putting our house in order. To us it seemed barely possible that a head-on collision could duplicate the chaos before us. We realized that there was men's work to be done, yet we hesitated.

"Lempky would enjoy this," George observed. "He would revel in this wreckage."

Bob lit his pipe and I eased myself into a more comfortable position.

"Continue, George; anything to delay the ordeal," I encouraged.

"Lempky was a sealhead I roomed with three years ago up in Fifty-Sixth Street. When I said he would enjoy this break in the levee I had my fingers crossed. Though he has reformed somewhat, he is the neatest and most methodical man in the world, and if he should see a street torn up for a new sewer he would be upset for a week. But I am dealing out the cognac before the consommé.

"How I happened to team up with Lempky doesn't matter. A man does strange things when he is broke, and I was nicked all round the edge and cracked across the middle in those days. You see, my salary as a frame-maker on the *Chronicle* art staff wouldn't keep a Salvation Army lass in tambourine skins. I guess what drew me to him first was the fact that he had a good civil-service job and couldn't be fired for anything short of arson.

"He was a big, bald-headed chap and a slow talker—weighed his words as carefully as a grocer weighs his hand with each pound of butter. But I knew something was wrong as soon as he moved his traps into the room.

"You see, he had two trunks full of the usual gear, and in addition he brought in three big filing cabinets and a roll-top desk. Strange ornaments for a narrow-chested, third-floor room, I thought, but said nothing at the time.

"It took him about a month to get settled, and I observed his technique with amazement and alarm. Gradually it dawned on me that he had been bitten by an adding-machine when a mere child, for he was precision on casters. That made me wonder if we would get along well together, because I am as neat and tidy as a rummage sale at closing time.

"Well, the desk and cabinets were tried out in a dozen different poses before he was satisfied, and then he gave his attention to the wardrobe. We shared the one closet, and while I could have worn all my clothes at once without increasing my temperature half a degree, any one could see that the garments of two men hung on our hooks.

"So long as the closet door swung freely I didn't care how I jammed things in; but he made his section look like a well-conducted haberdashery. There was a separate hanger for each pair of trousers and coat, a rack for his shoes, a shelf for his hats, and a stand for his three sticks.

"Then he added the finishing touch by tacking on the door a chart he got in a gents' furnishing store. It was one of those score-cards that tell just what the well-dressed man should wear; you know: Morning, for business—gray striped overalls with jumper to match; brown button boots; gray fedora, and oak cane. Afternoon, social—plaid swimming trunks; blue spectacles; black derby, and bamboo stick, straight handle—and so on. Yup, that was Lempky.

"Then he went to work on his cabinets. Night after night I would say:

"'Come on, Lempky, let's see a show or something,' and he would shake his head.

"'No, I've got a lot of work to do. I am cross-indexing my files.'

"And what do you suppose he had in those files. There were bales of newspaper clippings; magazine stories he fancied; bills, paid and the usual kind; pamphlets on all sort of subjects; cards advertising restaurants, tailors, yes—and old-clothes men; catalogues of everything from automobiles to zithers; canceled checks; valentines—

"But why continue with the list? He saved everything and kept a record of it in a card-index. It was a hard question he couldn't answer after consulting his cabinets.

"When he had the files under control he dived at the desk, dry-docked it, and overhauled it thoroughly. There was a proper place for everything, and the top—you would think he had laid it out with a T-square and compass. The desk-pad, ink-well, paste-pot, scissors, pin-box, ruler, and letter-basket were arranged so exactly that he could label 'em 'ABC-XYZ' and work out any problem in geometry by 'em.

"'I must have everything where I can put my hands on it in the dark,' he explained to me.

"'Much more simple to carry a box of matches,' I said.

"He stared as though he had heard the sphinx sneeze, but my suggestion blossomed and bore fruit. Always

after that he carried a box of matches in the lower left corner of his waistcoat.

"After he had systematized his junk he devoted the long winter evenings to the study of automobiles, trying to decide just which car he would build a garage round when he could afford it. That was Lempky—every breath he drew was arranged for earlier in the day.

"Yes—and to see him scan a menu-card would remind you of a pawnbroker examining a watch. Each dish he ordered was selected because of the calories, proteids, hypophosphites, vim, and ginger infesting it.

"Anyhow, he supplemented his automobile education with a lot of miscellaneous lore. He read furniture catalogues and home-builders' guides by the score, and began to watch the classified columns in the newspapers for bargains in house-furnishings.

"The landlady let him store stuff in a spare room on the top floor, and it wasn't long before he had quite a collection of assorted furniture. He told me it was a good investment and an ideal way for a young man to save his money.

"'But what will you do with this stuff?' I asked him.

"'I will need it when I am married,' he said in that careful way of his.

"That staggered me, and I went down for the count when I saw him reading up on a lot of statistics about marriage, the selection of the ideal wife, and such. He had a ton of that variety of literature in his files. I kicked myself for not suspecting it before—he intended to choose a wife in the same cautious manner he ordered his food.

"'But, Lempky,' I argued, 'here's a stunt where method is nix. You can't run through a card index like this—blondes, blondes, brunettes—tall—short, there, now for the cross file—130 pounds—140—145— Ah, here we are: Miss Nellie Jones, 143 Mendelssohn Mall—brunette — tall — 145 pounds, just the lady! and order the wedding announcements from your favorite stationer. When that system was made up the key was thrown away and you must take your chances with the rest of us.'

"'I am a big, strong, serious man. I will choose a suitable wife,' he answered with ponderous dignity.

"'Gus, there is only one thing to prevent you from becoming a great general,' I said. 'They wouldn't let you take your filing cabinets out on the battle-field.'

"Do you know, he was looking for the one woman even then. Had been for two years. Always on the street, in the theater, restaurant, or street-car, he inspected every girl he saw and considered her qualifications. There was nothing of the flirt about him — no butterfly stuff. He was a serious, slow-moving ox.

"One night after I had turned in he came home, and when I woke up he was at his desk, writing. Just to make a little conversation, I asked him if he had succeeded in locating his soul-mate.

"'I have seen the lady I intend to marry,' he said.

"'Her name is Miss Rachel Spalding, and she lives at 2004 West Eightieth Street. I followed her to her home and asked her name at the corner drug-store.

"'I am writing to her now. I shall tell her why I must see her and ask for an interview.'

"The next morning he mailed her the letter telling all about himself and why he wanted to meet her, and inclosing several good references and a photograph taken for precisely that occasion. A couple of nights later, when I came in after dinner, I found him getting into his dress-clothes.

"'What's up, Gus? Going out among them to-night?' I asked.

"He was reading the well dressed man chart at the moment and didn't answer. I heard him mumbling:

'Pearl studs—white waistcoat—lawn tie—no jewelry.' Then he looked up.

"'To-night I am to call on Miss Spalding.'

"'Is this an open meet or an invitation affair?'

"'I have received a note from the lady, requesting me to call at her home,' he said and continued with his preparations.

"'Gus,' I said sadly, 'I fear for you. If you only had a saving sense of humor—'

"'In my files, under A-Anecdotes, you will find some excellent jokes and quips,' he interrupted, and then he wunk—wa—well, winked at me and went his way.

"Somehow I envied him the adventure, and all the evening I was wondering how he was making out. I waited up that night to get the returns, but when he came home he wouldn't say much, although he seemed well pleased with everything.

"To make a long story short, he called regularly on the lady, and after he had worn out two doormats saying fond farewells in the Spalding vestibule he asked me if I cared to go up there with him some night. Said Rachel had a sister I would like.

"I went. I will not dwell on Rachel's charms beyond saying that she was Rowena, Annette Kellerman, and Kathleen Mavourneen in one. It was quite evident that she was a strong personality.

"Sister was an attractive little party with a boyish face, curly hair, snub nose and freckles, and jammed so full of life that she couldn't be still a minute. We got on well from the start.

"She led me to a retired corner, and and in five minutes she had read my palm, secured my opinion of the shows in town, and confided to me that she wished she was a man so she could play short-stop for the Giants. It seemed that her mother was dead, and father was too busy making money to devote much time to the fireside.

"Sister—her name was Glen—had been attending some sort of school. Rachel, being very independent, was secretary to the president of a steamship company down-town.

"As the evening wore on Glen told me that Rachel had answered Gus's letter partly for a lark and partly because he seemed so sincere that she was curious to see him. From time to time we could hear Rachel and Gus talking, and all their topics of conversation would sink like a rock if placed in the duck-pond.

"Well, 'a nice time was had by all, as the country newspapers say; and when we left I promised Glen I would call her up and send postcards, and all that sort of thing. Rachel was very cordial and nice to me, and told me to be neighborly now that I knew the address, or words to that effect.

"Going home I said: 'You're a wiz, Gus; tally one hundred for the filing cabinets.'

"He smiled but said nothing, and we continued on our way, busy with our own private ideas.

"The next day I asked my boss for a raise and got it. Then I took a bunch of my drawings for samples, went round to the magazine offices, and dragged away three manuscripts to illustrate.

"My first investment was a new dress-suit, and thereafter, when Gus boarded the car for Eightieth Street, I was right on deck and matched him for the fares.

"One night, when we were preparing to hit the hay, I said to Gus:

"'I don't want to hurt your feelings, old man, and perhaps it isn't quite the square thing for me to do; but Rachel has promised to marry me.'

"'Not at all, George; don't worry a minute about me. I congratulate you. Rachel is an estimable woman, but Glen is sort of different, and I—well, we—'

"We shook hands on it.

"The double wedding came off without a hitch."

The Editor's Desk

NOW that we are to become a weekly, we are sure that most of our good friends will be tickled to death because the good things will come along swimmingly at a rate heretofore unprecedented.

Imagine, therefore, if you can, getting four times as many good Burroughs's stories every year; having a chance to read six or seven stories by Perley Poore Sheehan, rather than two. Fancy William Patterson White, Stephen Chalmers, Chauncey C. Hotchkiss, J. Earl Clauson, and other writers of long stories and novels, being practically always on the job; and then when it comes to short stories, picture a practically unbroken flow of good humor and excitement from the riotous pens of such chaps as T. Bell, Frank Condon, Donald A. Kahn, and Frank Leon Smith. This will be some treat, believe us!

Right off the bat we announce at the top of our lungs, so to speak, a brand new novelette by Edgar Rice Burroughs. It has all of the fascination that Burroughs's stories have, especially those which deal, like "Tarzan of the Apes" and "The Man Without a Soul," with the hot Eastern jungles, with savage, untrained temperaments in conflict with the more effete spirit of civilization. The story is called

THE ETERNAL LOVER

In it we catch fleeting glimpses of "Tarzan of the Apes," by this time a responsible member of British society, who with his wife has hunting preserves in that same part of the world where he was born and spent his childhood and youth.

By actual right it appears that this story, on account of some of its characters, is a sequel to another entertaining yarn of Mr. Burroughs. That ought to come first, but we are holding it for another time. All we can say is that we advise you to keep your eye on *Barney Custer,* and also upon young *Lieutenant Butzow,* because you will meet them again. You must be sure to take a look at this yarn, because it is real stuff.

There is going to be a new serial, and it is by Stephen Chalmers. He has named his story

THE CASTLE ON THE CRAG

and he has developed one of the most exciting and intriguing Scottish mysteries that we have seen in a dog's age. Chalmers, with one or two other fellows who write for us, such as Simpson, are able to give us the real Scottish thing, without overplaying the dialect end of the game and going too much into character-drawing.

You will find in this last novel of Mr. Chalmers a mystery that runs with a quiet intensity that few such stories can have. We are sure you will become interested in the young physician *Bray,* and in that charming lassie, *Jean Bothwell.* Also, you will very likely shiver in your boots and your back hair will rise right up in the air over *Sir Mungo Black,* as plausible and weird a villain as we have encountered this many a day.

Naturally we shall have more of Mr. Sullivan's "The Smoldering Past."

and Mr. Cass's "The Man Who Could Not Die," and of Mr. Clauson's "The Devil and Dr. Foster." So you see, when it comes to long stories you will have a variety not to be kicked at.

We can promise you by way of short stuff, yarns of humor and excitement by all of our old friends.

Surely THE ALL-STORY WEEKLY will ring a bell, for what more could any of us want, seeing that the quality of the stories is *par excellence*, than have a greater quantity.

NEW YORK, N. Y.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

I think Edgar Rice Burroughs's story, "A Man Without a Soul," is the best story I ever read in a magazine. I hope there are more like it.

Yours truly,

H. L. M.

OAKDALE, California.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR:

Of all the good stories we've ever read, the "Mars" stories are the most absorbing. We wouldn't miss the future adventures of *John Carter* for the price of both yearly subscriptions. Will these stories be issued in book form? Well, I guess I've thrown enough roses for once.

Yours for better magazines,

MR. AND MRS. W. H. S.

P. S.—Give us a diamond-mine story for a change.

CHICAGO, Illinois.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

As a reader and admirer of THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE, I thought I would like to tell you what I think of it and its contributors.

Among the best and most powerful stories I have read were "The Pilgrims in Love" and "The Love Caprice," by De Lysle Ferree Cass. We want more of them, as we all find them extraordinarily good. Am looking forward to that long novel of Mr. Cass's which deals with the primitive East.

Very truly yours,

B. D.

THONOTOSASSA, Florida.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

Am enclosing $1.50 for renewal to THE ALL-STORY. Guess it has become a fixture at our house! I have enjoyed the magazine very much the past year. Some stories, of course, more than others, but there is always a welcome for THE ALL-STORY, and we begin to look for it several days before it is due, so that shows the interest.

"The Man Without a Soul" is a "humdinger," and who but Mr. Burroughs would have thought of such a plot for a story?

Say, wasn't "Angel Citizens" a surprise? My father-in-law was in the West when things were about as wild as they were in Angel City, and he was very much interested in it; speaks of *Dave and Smoky* still.

"The Cave Girl" was good, only it stopped so sudden it jolted me! Is there to be a sequel? Hope so.

I am hoping *John Carter* may rescue his princess this time; it is getting rather drawn out; hope the one in December is better than "The Gods of Mars." I did not like it so well as "Under the Moons of Mars."

We liked "King and Man," "A Daughter of Tumult," while "A Devil Afloat" was some story. "Hannibal's Oath" was fairly good, but am very much interested in "Her Forbidden Knight."

All the stories have helped pass away the summer afternoons and evenings. The short stories, on an average, have been very good. I haven't any "kick." Will leave that to others, for I dare say none of us could please everybody, and things I might not like would please some one else—and the reverse.

Here is wishing you luck and "lots" of good stories for the coming year.

Very truly yours,

G. S. P.

LOS ANGELES, California.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR:

I note that "Warlord of Mars" begins in the December issue of THE ALL-STORY and that "Under the Moons of Mars" and "The Gods of Mars" appeared in some previous issue.

I wish to read these two latter stories as well as the "Warlord of Mars," and I wish you would forward me all the magazines containing these stories.

As I do not know whether or not these stories were serials or complete in one

book. I am unable to forward price of same, but I wish you would send them, and I shall promptly forward you check or money-order for same. If you are unable to do this, you would oblige me greatly by advising me in which numbers and what magazine these above stories appeared.

Thanking you in advance, I am

Very truly yours,

L. S. D.

Brooklyn, New York.

Editor, The All-Story Magazine.

Dear Sir:

I have been reading The All-Story regularly since the issue of February, 1913, and I must say that the stories it contains are excellent.

I have just finished reading "The Man Without a Soul," and in my opinion it is the most attractive story I have ever read, except, perhaps, "The Copper Princess": it is a toss up between them.

Mr. Burroughs certainly knows his business when it comes to writing stories full of life; "for which you got to give 'im credit." His "Cave Girl" was a dandy, and also "The Gods of Mars," and I will surely welcome the coming of the "Warlord of Mars" and am positive already that it will be as exciting as its predecessor.

I am a regular "consumer" of your Table-Talk. I have not failed to notice the comments of the "Tarzan" boosters, and they have created a desire on my part to read this story; and so I decided to send to you for a copy of the issue of October, 1912, containing E. R. Burroughs's story, "Tarzan of the Apes"; hence the enclosed stamps.

Respectfully,

H. M. V. O.

St. Louis, Missouri.

Editor, The All-Story Magazine.

Dear Sir:

I am just through reading my November All-Story, and I would like to say, if I may, that I have read and still read a good many books and haven't found anything to equal your All-Story Magazine. I can hardly wait for the next number.

I think it would be grand if you could give it to us a little more regularly, such as twice a month, or every week. I was sick and back about eight books, and maybe I didn't have a feast when I started! If I came to a good serial all I had to do was to go to the next book and, believe me, it didn't take long to catch up.

I was taking other magazines, too, but quit because I didn't have the time—not all, but some, and you may be sure I never stopped The All-Story, because it would seem impossible to get along without it.

Hoping this equals two kicks, anyway, I still remain

Your faithful reader,

Mrs. F. W.

Tampa, Florida.

Editor, The All-Story Magazine:

Have just finished your November All-Story and noted your promise of a sequel to "The Gods of Mars." Let us hope so. I certainly appreciate and admire Edgar Rice Burroughs's stories, but deliver me from reading another of them when they end as "Tarzan of the Apes" and "The Gods of Mars" and "The Cave Girl."

This month's "A Man Without a Soul" is splendid, but it lacks the one best feature of "Tarzan"—that is, the probability of such a thing happening in real life. I think that "Tarzan" is the best story Mr. Burroughs ever will write.

I love to read the Editor's Desk. It claims my attention first no matter how interesting a serial may be. I like "Her Forbidden Knight" very well, but have stopped reading "Hannibal's Oath." I lost interest in it and am glad it is ended so there will be room for a more interesting yarn for me.

This month's new serial, "The House of Sorcery," to be real slangy, reads as if it were going to be "some story."

Several months ago I read several letters requesting a twice-a-month All-Story. Say, Mr. Editor, please explain how a person that works all day and has only a few hours to read can keep up with it at that rate. No, sir; The All-Story as it is is O. K. Let it stay so.

Like E. E. M., I enjoyed "The Copper Princess," and would like to see another story by Perley Poore Sheehan. (Some name, isn't it?)

Well, I guess I'd better quit this before you fall asleep. Excuse this long one, but I have accumulated things to write about for so long that if I was to wait another month or two—(perish the thought).

Hoping this will not be misunderstood,

Sincerely,

M. M. C.

Colton, California.

Editor, The All-Story Magazine:

Although I have long been a reader of The All-Story, this is my first attempt at The Editor's Desk, which is my favorite "story" of them all.

I have a suggestion in which I think

many of your magazine readers will support me. When you have a story end on one side of a page fill the other side up with poetry, anecdotes, or short stories and begin the new story on a new page.

The reason is this. Many of us are binding the best, or rather our favorite stories, and it makes it awkward to have one story beginning on the back or in the middle of the page of an ended story. Of course this is only a suggestion, for I like your magazines well enough as they are.

Of all your writers, I think Edgar Rice Burroughs best. George A. England and J. Earl Clauson are good. "King and Man," by Mary Linda Bradley, was fine.

This is long, but being my first letter, perhaps you'll forgive me.

MRS. G. W. H.

NEW YORK CITY.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

Being a constant reader of your magazine, and finding same much to my pleasure, I respectfully ask you to grant me the favor of publishing another sequel to that of "Sands o' Life."

It has afforded me great pleasure in reading this story, and though there are many good ones, this has held my interest above the rest. The suspense is very teasing, and it holds the reader's interest to the very end.

I assure you that another such novel would be greatly appreciated, and I hope to read one in the near future.

Yours very truly,

S. L. S.

RUTLAND, Vermont.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

I have just finished reading "The Outsider," by Mr. Clauson, and wish to congratulate him for writing such a fine story. I hope he will favor us with another one soon.

Very truly yours,

F. A. F.

NEW YORK CITY.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

I am a constant reader of your magazine and find it most interesting.

That Mr. Burroughs of yours is decidedly a great writer. That story about "Mars" is worth a dollar of any man's money. I followed the former two instalments to the delicious end. At present am in the third heaven reading the "Warlord of Mars."

There was another story or novel I should say, you printed some time ago. I don't remember now just when, or its author, but the title was "The Sands o' Life."

Say, why don't you have a sequel to that grand story printed. I delight in such sea-fighting stories, and that "Sands o' Life" story was the best ever.

Print some more, please; that is, in fact, my main reason in writing you this letter, because the last time I saw my hero he was thinking of marrying the governor's daughter. I'd like to see him at sea again.

D. H. B.

LOWELL, Massachusetts.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

Enclosed find thirty cents in stamps for which please send me the April and May, 1912, issues of THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE, which I have missed and contain the continuation of stories that I am intensely interested in.

Your ALL-STORY MAGAZINE is the best all-story magazine published, bar none.

Trusting you can supply the missing numbers, I am,

Respectfully yours,

H. D. T.

MELVILLE, Saskatchewan, Canada.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

I have often thought I would write and add my few words of appreciation to the general chorus. Of course there are stories and stories. There have been stories in THE ALL-STORY that I did not care for, but I am not selfish enough, I hope, to want the magazine filled up with my favorites. I am satisfied if I find one or two.

Just one like "The Outsider" is worth the price of the magazine twice over. Once for the story *as a story*, and once for the lesson it teaches. In that particular story Mr. Clauson scored a home run. I like Burroughs's stories fine, but I think he must be saving up for a sequel to "The Cave Girl. If he isn't, then I am surprised at him.

Extending my best wishes to THE ALL-STORY family, both readers and writers and editors, I am,

Yours very truly,

C. R. H.

PORTLAND, Maine.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

I would like to say there is some class to your ALL-STORY. Burroughs not only is a swell writer, but a business man from the word go.

I read your Editor's Desk. It is interesting, but have to smile at some of the letters about how Burroughs cuts his stories

short. Some kicking about the "Moons of Mars"; then about the "Gods of Mars." Well, they ought to know that *John Carter* came from Virginia, and he was not going to leave his little wife locked up in the Temple of the Sun laying eggs for the First Born when they are selling for fifty cents per dozen on the outside.

I was reading what C. C. H. thinks. Burroughs intends leaving his "Cave Girl" on the island. Well, she will not spoil there for a short time. He has his eye on her, leave it to Burroughs. I would like to bet a good hat that the first time his boss gives him a day off he will doll up and beat it after his "Cave Girl."

Well, sir, your book is good from front to back. My favorites are "The Copper Princess," "A Man Without a Soul," "The Devil Afloat," "The Brain Blight," "The Black Comet."

They are all O. K., but the best of all is the planet Mars stuff. Stick to that and we will stick to you.

Hoping you will have to put in five more printing-presses, I remain as ever yours,

J. McL.

HELENA, Arkansas.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

I have just got my January ALL-STORY, and as soon as I finish writing to you I am going to sit down and not get up until I finish it. It is some book.

I have been reading THE ALL-STORY every month for three years, and I enjoy every one. The first story that I really was crazy about was "Prince Imbecile." "The Invisible Empire" was fine. I always like Oriental stories, and hope THE ALL-STORY will have some more.

I liked "The House of Sorcery" fine. *Cliff Ellis* certainly has a sense of humor. I wish THE ALL-STORY could come out a little oftener. Well, I'll write again when I have finished "Warlord of Mars."

Hoping you will have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year,

A very enthusiastic reader,

MRS. J. W. J.

COLUMBUS, Ohio.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

I have just finished reading the December instalment of Burroughs's "The Warlord of Mars," and desire to express my satisfaction with the fascinating imagery of his yarn. I must confess that his endings have aroused much ire on the part of fellow readers, but to me they appear great—promising better things in store in the way of a sequel.

I enjoyed reading "The Outsider," by J. Earl Clauson, in your current issue, but would have felt its appeal a great deal stronger about next August. If you have any more polar stories save 'em until the winter is past.

"Nothing but the Truth," by Dick Duffy, was very good, and I think we can stand one or two more serials by the same author. Coax him to write a few short stories. His style needs a little more action.

You mustn't accept my few "digs" in this letter in the light of adverse criticism. Far be it from me to knock the dear old ALL-STORY or any member of its admirable editorial staff. With best wishes to you and THE ALL-STORY for a very successful New Year, I remain,

Yours truly,

F. L. McK.

PENSACOLA, Florida.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

I started reading THE ALL-STORY a half year or so ago. I have read every book-length novel in them up to December except "The Invisible Empire" and "The Angel Citizens."

I have read all the serial stories and all of the short stories.

The best among the short stories was "To Slay at Will," "The Other Katherine," "Saving the Queen," "The Terpsichorator," and last, but not least, "The Thrower." The best among the "B.-L's" were "Cowards All," "The Brain Blight," "A Thieves' Comedy," "A Man Without a Soul," and "A Devil Afloat." Why not have W. T. Eldridge write another detective story featuring *Yockton*.

I admire E. R. Burroughs very much. His Mars stories are very good.

Glad to see "Warlord of Mars" has started. The main trouble with THE ALL-STORY is that it does not come soon enough. Why not make it a bimonthly? The best serial stories in my opinion were "The Gods of Mars," "The House of Sorcery," "The Cave Girl," and "Hannibal's Oath."

I think Burroughs is as good as Haggard.

Hoping for a twice-a-month ALL-STORY, I am,

Yours truly,

O. A. G.

BELVIDERE, New Jersey.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR:

I have just finished reading the letters from your readers, and I agree with D. M. R., that it is too long to wait, and that THE ALL-STORY should be a twice-a-month magazine. I enjoy the stories by E. R.

Burroughs, especially the stories about *John Carter*.

Hoping the twice-a-month will appear soon, and that we may hear from E. R. B. again soon, I remain,

Yours,

W. C. D.

NEW YORK, N. Y.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR:

Just a little noise from an ALL-STORY bug. Am a reader of some eight monthly books, but of them all THE ALL-STORY is "It." Your big story-writers have the punch, believe me.

Please tell Mr. Burroughs, or Bean, he sure has my animal (goat); but he's there a hundred and fifty ways, and then some. Let him burn some midnight oil and give us more.

Yours truly,

G. S.

CAMDEN, Michigan.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

Please find enclosed one dollar and a half for which please send THE ALL-STORY another year. Please do not omit the January number as I do not wish to miss any of the serials. "A Thieves' Comedy" was extra good. Give us some more by same author.

Do not forget to send the January number.

Yours truly,

J. H. S.

U. S. S. Buffalo,
CORINTO, Nicaragua.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

Please let me know, if possible, the numbers of THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE which contain the stories "Under the Moons of Mars" and "The Gods of Mars."

Yours truly,

J. H. N.

BAKERSFIELD, California.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

I am writing you to see if I can get the predecessors to "Warlord of Mars." I believe they are "Under the Moons of Mars" and "The Gods of Mars"; also the much commented upon story "Tarzan of the Apes."

I have never read much in magazines, but a few days ago I purchased your Christmas number and started "Warlord of Mars," and am much interested.

I have managed to get hold of two back numbers, one with a part of "The Gods of Mars" and one with a part of "Under the Moons of Mars," and now you have got me going, so if I can get the stories here mentioned in book-form or any other form, just so I get to read the stories, I would appreciate any information you might give me.

Yours truly,

A. L. E.

CHICAGO, Illinois.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

Give us more "Copper Princess." While the unfolding of the story is fascinating the story of the writer's mind is the most delightful.

J. B. S.

PALACIOS, Texas.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

Have you all the back numbers of THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE containing the two serial stories, "Under the Moons of Mars" and "The Gods of Mars," or have you these stories in book form? At what dates did those stories appear?

Yours,

M. V. W.

LONDON, England.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

I see a letter from one J. E. F., Jr., asking you where he can get all the Martian stories of Burroughs in book form. Please tell me also about this—I was just going to write anyway. If you supply them I will send cash by return mail.

Please accept the assurance of one who reads a lot and has some judgment, that your stories are altogether out of sight of our pappy English magazine stories. I can't read them now. But when are you going to publish fortnightly?

Hurry your reply *re* Martian stories. They have all others down and out.

Yours faithfully,

L. H.

HUDSON, South Dakota.

EDITOR, THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE:

I enclose you three dollars for which send me THE ALL-STORY MAGAZINE for the next two years. I have enjoyed it during the past year and do not want to miss a copy, so kindly see that my subscription is continued.

Respectfully yours,

R. O. S.