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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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by Joseph Pettee Copp

Author of

"Allatambour"

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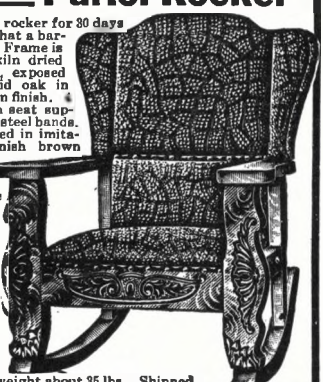

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME XCIV — NUMBER 3

CONTENTS FOR MARCH 1, 1919

FOUR CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

FOUR SHORT STORIES

VERSE

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

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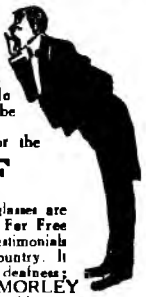

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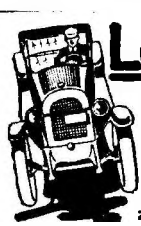

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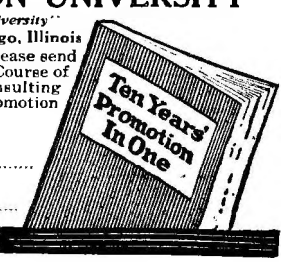

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Pug-ly-gug-lo

by Joseph Pettee Copp

Author of "Allatambour," etc.

CHAPTER I.

AGAIN OF THE GUAM CONSTABULARY.

WHEN I was chosen for this detail, to find out the true motive of white men rumored living on Tabu Island, the story told me by Captain Jack Flanders of the Guam Constabulary did not ring with adventurous clang but sounded more as if I were to go on a peaceful trip equal to a vacation. I had left my home on the Triplets with my wife, intent on getting a rest, and to be thrown as I was into the midst of such turbulent excitement on the island of Tabu was indeed a suprise.

But it is not to complain that I write this —more that my superior officers of the Constabulary may have a fair insight and better understanding of actual conditions as I found them on Tabu and how affairs were left when Urido—my Chimoro man—and I got through with our operations.

When my wife and I left our home on the Triplets on my father-in-law's ship, the Patience Standish, I really anticipated going to Hong-Kong for a much-needed rest. But we stopped off in Guam to visit old friends and familiar surroundings of my youth, and it was when I called upon Captain Standish that I changed my mind and decided to go to Tabu.

He persuaded me that a rest and a valuable service for him would be my accomplishment if I would cause the Patience Standish to turn from her course far enough to leave me upon Tabu's equatorial shores. And since accepting this commission to get information from Tabu I have often wondered if possibly Captain Jack had an inkling of what stirring incidents might arise, and, knowing my peaceful nature and reticence to do any person violence, he would have his little joke.

If so I forgive him, for I yet live, though I often wonder where the good fortune came from that brought me through the rough ways—with more scars, to be sure, but alive and whole.

As for Urido, my Chimoro man, who, I have known since my infancy—in childish fancies I often wished that I might grow up to be as big and strong a man as he—that great hulk of physical strength showed that he had a brain in his head and could use it.

He's a mighty loyal friend and just since our trip to Tabu I miss him greatly.

To start at the real beginning of my excursion for the Guam Constabulary, I will speak of my visit to Captain Jack's office in the Constabulary Police Station, Agana, Guam. Possibly it were better that I had

stayed away that fifth of June; however, I saw Captain Jack. He was sitting at his desk, as usual engrossed with typewritten sheets about troublesome Chimoros and the like.

It was right then that I really started on the expedition, for he looked up and the friendly light in his eye and the enthusiasm there shining met my gaze, and I was once more transported back to the days of my sergeancy under his command and I was meat for anything that he might suggest.

That any plans he had would be for a good cause goes without saying, and I would be the one to know that after the way he picked me from the great number of Chimoro youth when he came from America to Guam and molded my developing self well along the line of his high ideals, and made me so that I now measure my height well above the six-foot mark and—with the exception of Urido—can best any Chimoro in any athletic contest, and best all Chimoros in knowledge learned from books.

And let me say that if anything stood me in good stead on my trip to Tabu it was that self-same good physique and my ability to think, for without either that arch-fiend Selig Bremen, whom I found in control of affairs on the island, would have downed me many times.

And to Captain Jack I owe my Americanism, for, although I am of American parents, I grew up in ignorance of that fact due to circumstances that separated me from my mother and father when I was newly born, and the Spaniards who were in Guam before the Americans almost beat me into believing that Americanism and despotism were synonymous. I speak of these things because of the particular bearing they have on this one adventure.

When I sat down there in front of the captain and he so quickly and characteristically plunged right into the heart of the business uppermost in his mind and explained this mission to me, I could well understand that it was to Tabu that I wanted to go—such is his power to instil enthusiasm in others.

"Alonzo," he said, "I have rumors of trouble on Tabu. I am told that white men have landed there, where white men have never been allowed to stay before, because the king of the blacks distrusts them. And I am told also that there must be a great treasure of pearls stored somewhere on the island, for during the last ten generations of the ruling house the royal agents have had the first choice from every diver's catch as they were brought in from the vast oyster beds on the ocean floor adjacent to Tabu.

"The agent always takes one—the best—which is the king's tax on the pearl industry. Then the diver is allowed to dispose of the rest to a Japanese firm which sends a boat twice a year to collect the precious gems.

"But the royal stock has not been known to leave the island. And as no white men are allowed either on the island to stay or to go near the diving grounds, I am at a loss to know how the white men rumored to be there got there. But Uncle Sam's got a protecting arm around the island now and these crooks 've got to keep hands off!"

And when he asked: "Will you go, Alonzo, and find out what these white men are doing on Tabu?" my answer was "Yes," for I could picture in my mind these simple natives being misled into confiding the hiding place of their famed treasure to unscrupulous whites. Under the circumstances I felt that it was the only right thing to do.

But we both failed to properly gage the real villainy of the dominant figure in this experience, Selig Bremen, a white-skinned man, but a black-souled brute. Surely no more rapacious, cold-blooded fiend, with a self-indulgent nature and a creed outlined by some radical fanatic, had ever visited these parts.

And may a kind, benevolent Providence successfully steer all others of his loose-skinned, anemic appearance and crafty ways from this end of the earth!

But I believe that our failure to properly fathom the depths of this man's shrewdness and treachery was excusable because of the meager reports we had to go on. The pearls were what we figured drew the whites. From such an incentive we might have drawn conclusions of the desperate character of the men, but our report, which, it is true, came through a more or less un-

reliable source, didn't seem to bear any alarming features.

"I have been told that there are but two whites on the island," Captain Jack said.

So, like Captain Jack, I thought it would be an easy matter to scare these two whites away. But I here emphatically say that Selig Bremen and his partner, Gustav Reiker, were two hard nuts to crack. They not only felt sure that there was a treasure on Tabu and that they were going to have it, but they also insisted that they should have everything else pertaining to prosperity on and around the island.

Furthermore I believe that if Bremen had not been so covetous of Pylanpin, princess of the royal house of Gutto Tabu, our adventure may have had a different trend and possibly been more peaceful.

But I am getting ahead of my story. When I left Captain Jack's office in Agana, Guam, I did so in deep thought. If these blacks on Tabu had a rule that no white men should be allowed residence among them, then I figured that my reception would not be cordial—yet these other white men were there and from the rumors we had heard they were allowed to stay.

If such was the case there surely was a way. Exactly what that way was would have to depend upon circumstances and be decided after my arrival.

This conclusion was reached in my mind as I got to the end of the shell-bordered path leading from the door of the station-house to the street, and as I was about to turn onto the road I heard a woman's squeal of surprise. Looking along the white coral highway, the Agana-Piti thoroughfare, I saw the cause.

My man Urido, towering even above the thatch eaves of the tipa huts bordering the way, was standing in the road about half a block away, seemingly undecided whether to continue on his way toward Piti or return to the place from whence the squeal had come.

A slender, comely Chimoro maid, who had evidently called some pert comment after him and did not expect any answer, was standing in front of one of the tipa huts, looking with surprise toward Urido.

Usually he paid no more heed to the sallies of young women than a duck would to a drop of water on its back, but this time, for some unexplainable reason, Urido was susceptible to the temptation to give tit for tat.

And knowing Urido as well as I did it was not strange to me that the girl should be surprised at his paying any attention to her jest. It was the first time that I had ever seen him even acknowledge that he knew that a female was in the vicinity.

The maid was laughing, and her brown face beamed with fun. But as tall Urido, slightly stooped, advanced with his awkward shuffle gait, his long apelike arms slightly extended and his head thrust forward, with his black, beady eyes intently watching her, the laughter died on her lips and she turned to flee.

Apparently my man Urido would stalk the woman of his choice as seriously as if she were wild game and he a starving, stone-age hunter. I watched to see what he would do next. I did not fear for the girl, for Urido was not vicious by nature.

Much alarmed, now, at the turn events had taken, she started for the door of her hut. But with remarkable agility for so awkward-appearing a man, Urido bounded in between her and the refuge.

She would have turned again and run from him, but with one hand he caught her by her bare shoulder and faced her about. He was not rough with her, but his massive paw on her shoulder made it look as if he held a baby's soft, small figure there.

Trying to hide her blushing face behind slender fingers she would have sunk to the ground had not Urido held her up. She only stood chest high to him.

Slowly I saw her feet leave the ground. Urido was lifting her with only his hand grasping her shoulder. To him she was as a light piece of bamboo.

With his free hand he gently drew her fingers from her face and then deliberately kissed her full upon the mouth. Carefully placing her on the ground once more he stood straight and looked off into space over her head.

Glad to be free, the girl ran stumbling and subdued into the tipa hut.

I came up to Urido expecting to reprimand him for being hard on the girl. He was standing straight and stiff. He was gazing off into nowhere right over my head, apparently trying to analyze his emotions.

His chest rose and fell in deep breaths. He had passed through a new experience—new thrills had been sent through his innermost fibers. Suddenly I saw him tremble as with a chill—from head to foot he shook. Even the huge bolo hanging at his waist-strap—he carried one twice as big as any ordinary Chimoro would—beat a tattoo against his bare thigh.

Then he threw his shoulders back, thrust his chest out and raising his head yet higher, walked right by me without even seeing me, deep in his own new, pleasing thoughts.

My Urido was indeed a changed man. It did no more than amuse me then. However, this change was to be the cause of more amusement and some anxiety for me in the days that we spent together on Tabu.

And once indeed it nearly cost us our lives—but again I anticipate.

CHAPTER II.

I MEET PUG-LY-GUG-LO.

WHEN I left the spot where Urido kissed the Chimoro maid I hailed a passing Chimoro in a springless cart, and behind his plodding caribou I slowly made a jolting trip to Piti, where I found a ship's boat waiting for me at the government landing.

The while that the men labored at their oars pulling the boat through the three miles of tortuous channel from the landing to the anchorage I was trying to formulate some reasonable explanantion to offer for my wife's ears that would overcome any protest at my abandoning the Hong-Kong trip.

As it happens, Captain Jack is not married—so it is easy enough for him to make any change of plan that he may fancy. But some day he'll be as able at fabricating excuses as any—some of which may even hold water.

However that may be, I was no nearer a good explanation when I mounted the Patience Standish's gangway than before I started from the shore. My wife has an awful foolish dread of anything which she thinks may get me into any hazardous position.

She met me as I stepped on deck and gazed affectionately into my eyes as she greeted me. For the life of me, as much as I tried, I could not meet that look.

Not that I felt that I had done any wrong in accepting the detail to go to Tabu—but this was our first trip since we had been married a year before and I did feel guilty when I thought of not continuing the journey to Hong-Kong.

"Why, Alonzo, what's troubling you?" she asked as she intuitively sensed something wrong.

"Nothing, my dear." I lied, in hope that some plausible explanation might come to me before long.

Patience didn't say any more just then. True to her name and disposition she bided her time.

I went below after a little chat on deck, where I interested Patience and amused myself by pointing out the spots around the bay familiar to me from infancy up to a year before, when I went to the Triplets on a mission for Captain Jack and there found me wealth, and adventure, and a wife.

Alone in my cabin I busied myself getting such equipment together as I thought would be well to take with me on my trip to Tabu. From its hook on a bulkhead I took down my toughened steel bolo, which I could use with even more dexterity than any Chimoro, excepting Urido, for I had been raised among them and drilled with this weapon.

In close fighting nothing is better in my hand than this weighty metal blade for cleaving black south island pates neat and clear.

But I reiterate that I am a mild-mannered man and abhor physical violence—but as a measure of preparedness I like the feel of the *slap-slap* of the bolo against my thigh as I walk on hostile ground.

Then my government automatic pistol came down from its hanging place and I was sitting on a trunk busily oiling the

moving parts of the gun — which I feel should never be neglected or when in grave need they may fail to function—when I heard my wife's step in the cabin salon.

"Alonzo!" she called softly, and I heard her footsteps approaching the door of my stateroom. She knocked. "Alonzo!"

Quickly I tucked the pistol, bolo and trappings behind the trunk to get them out of sight, then answered, "Come in, my dear." And I tried to hide my confusion and make the tone casual.

"Why tuck yourself away in this little hole? Don't be selfish with yourself, come up on deck and tell me some more of your boyhood experiences—but wait a moment!" she exclaimed, and caught my arm as I readily started for the door. "Just a moment—let's sit here a minute."

I am sure I must have looked the surprise I felt at this sudden reversal of request, for she laughed the low, musical little ripple that I so much like to hear.

"This is such a fine chance for you to get it off your chest—your trouble, you know," she said archly as she looked up at me. My wife is a patient but persistent little minx.

At first I was nonplused, for her suggestion to go on deck had impressed me very favorably, considering the armory I had so carelessly dropped behind the trunk. Of a sudden the quandary I was in cleared and the best course was very apparent to me—to frankly tell her the truth.

"Sit down, honey, and I'll tell you just what's happened," I said, sparring for time while I collected my thoughts and trying to decide where best to begin and how much of the truth would be best unsaid and how much to impart.

I took a turn across the room and while my back was turned she seated herself. For the moment I was off my guard and did not notice where she chose her seat. I heard an exclamation from her.

"Oh!" she squealed. "What's this doing here?" she innocently asked as her hand, dangling over the rear of the trunk came in contact with my cartridge belt. She hauled it out with the suspended automatic in the holster. "Why, Alonzo, why isn't this hanging up where it belongs?"

By letting her get the jump on me I surely had fizzled my tale at the very start. I suppose I must have looked guilty and that she put two and two together, with her imagination running riot, for she said:

"Oh! Alonzo, you've been to see Captain Flanders and he's gone and given you some horridly dangerous thing to do—and I thought you'd resigned from the Constabulary—and you didn't tell me—and I just know it's going to be awfully dangerous, or you'd not be called to go — and, oh—" She hid her face and took the rest out in sobs.

I hadn't said anything—but leave it to a woman to pick ravelings, then put them together and weave a whole yarn.

"Wait, my dear!" I protested, patting her head to soothe her. "You're jumping at conclusions. It is true that Captain Jack has ordered me out again," I said, using the word ordered because it sounded a little more official and compulsory. "And I feel it my duty to go. But it will be only a vacation trip this time, and I'll get a real rest," I added reassuringly.

"Yes," she sobbed, "I know your 'real rest'—it's a fight—the glorious conquest of some brute—that's what you call a real vacation. And I won't see you sent to your death by any captain of Constabulary just because you're the only man about who's got the nerve to go!" Her protest came as an explosion.

"You put it too strong, my dear," I said with feeling, for her outburst did shock me, for I am indeed a mild-mannered man and always avoid unnecessary conflict with my fellow men. "I am asked to stop off on the island of Tabu and gather information about some white men who have landed and settled among the blacks on the island —that's all," I told her, trying to make my voice sound casual.

"Yes, I know," she said heatedly as she straightened up suddenly, wiped the tears from her eyes and glared at an imaginary Captain Flanders across the room.

"If these white men weren't desperate they wouldn't be in this part of the world and under the Constabulary eye. And especially on this little once-by-twice island where nobody honest would go—except—

except to arrest them." She added the last as she thought of my going. "And why all of the arsenal!" she asked dramatically, as she dragged forth my bolo and added it to the pile of weapons in front of the trunk.

She had the best of the argument.

"Well, my dear," I said, wishing something would happen to suddenly terminate this conversation so I might have time to build up my defense, "I only get them ready and pray that they may never be dirtier than they are now—and it would hardly be seemly for a government officer to go on duty on a far-away station without his side arms, would it, my dear?"

I knew that I was getting deeper into the mire all the time.

"If I go armed—you see—the other fellow is overawed and won't be so likely to fight," I said, and considered it a bright thought at the time; but the more I turned it over in my mind the weaker seemed the logic of it.

A knock sounded on the cabin-door and I was very anxious not to keep whoever it was waiting. "Come in," I called.

In backed my father-in-law's black quartermaster. "No! No!" he was saying to some insistent fellow who was with him, and the while was trying to push the visitor back. But his efforts in my behalf were useless, for the man who was supposed to stay out until announced would not wait.

He was a Chimoro from Soumaye — I knew the fellow. He was a good, substantial, plodding sort of a native who was not blessed with enough initiative to do any one harm.

"Let him in," I said to the black quartermaster. "What is it?" I asked the man.

"Ah! *señor!*" he blurted breathlessly, holding up his hands as his agitation found expression.

"Speak out, Pedro," I encouraged him. "Tell me what's the trouble"

"It's Urido, *señor*, he's killing a man!" and the fellow stopped for lack of breath. He had been paddling hard to get out to the ship and run down the cabin ladder in his hurry to get me the news.

"What's that!" I demanded, for I knew Urido was not one inclined to pick a fight.

"Urido, *señor*, he's fighting a stranger on the beach at Soumaye," Pedro gasped out, then took a couple of deep breaths before going on, as if storing up energy to tell the exciting news. "A great big *hombre*, like Urido, landed from a canoe on the south end of the island, and as he couldn't speak Spanish or English or Chimoro to tell us who and what he was, I and another fellow was bringing him down to Agana to Captain Flanders when we meets Urido and the two of them fight—an' we couldn't separate them — oh! *señor*, he's one big *hombre!*"

"Who's a big man?" I asked.

"The stranger, *señor*," the fellow said. "Like Urido he's so tall," and he stretched his hand high over his head to show how high the man stood. "He looks on the thatch of the tipa huts when he stands in the street," he finished triumphantly.

"I must go and see what's up," I said to my wife as I grabbed my hat from the bunk and started out after the Chimoro.

From the deck of the Patience Standish I could see a crowd gathered on the beach at Soumaye, three miles away. The native had an outrigger canoe alongside, and quickly getting into it we were soon speeding across the water to the seat of the trouble.

With the big lateen sail drawing strong from the northwest breeze off the ocean we made excellent time and when we landed I left the man to secure the boat while I ran up the beach. I could see the two giants still going after each other hammer-and-tongs.

Shoving the curious crowd of Chimoros aside I pushed through and for the first time I saw Pug-ly-gug-lo.

He was indeed a large man. He and Urido might have been brothers, for they were almost exactly of a height; as for color, the coffee-hued skins blended so close in the locked embrace in which I found them that it was hard to tell where one left off and the other began.

The muscles on their backs rippled, strained, tautened and relaxed as each tried for an advantage. And they fought with a serious manner that boded no good for the loser. I had seen Urido in mortal

combat before and knew him to be a stubborn fighter—and he had never yet been downed.

Now it looked as if he had met his match. Both were such perfect specimens of physical strength that neither showed any sign of exhaustion. Truly both were breathing with hard-drawn breath, but there was none of the laggard action of muscle that might have been expected in softer men after fighting for at least an hour.

I looked close to see which might be Urido, and it surprised me to have to do so, for usually he stood out so plainly with his great height and broad shoulders that I had no dificulty in distinguishing him at a distance. But this time I was stumped for the moment and I did not want to grab my friend roughly. The two surely did look much alike.

They swung about in their struggle and I darted forward for an opportunity offered to get between them. With hands together, as if diving into water, I rushed and split them apart while they were trying to get new holds.

So intent were they on each other that they did not see me coming and as a result they sprawled on the sand, each in a different direction.

"What's the matter here!" I demanded of Urido as he started to get up.

"H-m!" was his grunted response as he again made for the other man, without heed for me.

"Here! Here!" I shouted, grabbing my man and tightly holding him. At that he stopped and looked at me. I do not believe he had known that I was anywhere near before.

"Step out! I kill him myself!" he said quietly and in such a serious tone that I knew that he meant it. And the way he put it, as if he took it for granted that I was coming to his assistance to finish the stranger, was not pleasant to my ears, for it spelled some feud of long standing between these two and Urido had merely forgotten that I did not know of it.

"No!" I ordered. "Stop right now and tell me what you're fighting about!"

"Me an' him don' like each other," Urido said simply.

"Who is he?" I asked.

"Pug-ly-gug-lo—I know him long ago," Urido said.

"But he is a stranger on the island of Guam. Why do you treat him like this?" I asked.

"Him no good!" was the startling answer.

"Where does he come from?"

"Tabu." Urido said it with a familiarity that surprised me.

"Tabu!" I exclaimed. "Well, Urido, you must stop this fight right now and bring him off to the ship."

"No! I fight him now!"

"Do as I tell you—I want to talk to him all in one piece, not after you've finished with him," I said.

"Well"—and I could see the effect of the implied compliment on Urido as it slowly percolated into his thick skull—"I'll let him off till you're through, then—" and he made a suggestive gesture with his hands like wringing the neck of a chicken.

We went to the Patience Standish in a borrowed boat. Throughout the entire trip the two enemies glared at each other across the thwarts, for they both elected to sit in the bottom of the boat.

I walked between them as we went down to my cabin and held a tight grip on the arm of each, so that they wouldn't try to get around me and start something. Assuring myself that my wife was not within hearing distance of my room I seated one at one end of my stateroom and the other at the other, on the deck.

Then I plied Urido with questions and he, acting as interpreter, repeated them to Pug-ly-gug-lo. I was indeed interested to hear of affairs in Tabu and here, by some unknown cause, my good fortune was favored by a messenger direct from the front.

During all of the years that I had known Urido I had supposed he could talk nothing but Chimoro and English—not to except Spanish, which he learned as I did from the men who controlled Guam before the Americans came—and here he was glibly gutturing a guttural jargon with this dark-skinned foreigner, as if he had talked the man's language all of his life.

"Where did you learn the language?" I asked Urido as the first question.

"When I was young I go across the water," Urido said. And I knew that to be the truth, for he had been a sailor. That was the only explanation he would offer.

To him it was very plain — if a man has been a sailor he learns much, so why shouldn't he acquire a knowledge of a foreign language?

"Where did you first meet this man?" I asked.

"When I was young I go across water," was his answer again.

"All right," I said, and I gave up in despair of getting anything more along that tack. "Ask this fellow what he knows of two whites on the island of Tabu?"

Urido grunted out a few gutturals and the fellow seemed to understand, for he turned toward me and glowered at me as if I were some new danger to his safety and he was about to get me out of the way.

He was not inclined to want to talk. But Urido was a good man to set on him, for he barked out a whole kennel of growls and grunts which brought out answer in kind from the man.

Finally, after about a quarter of an hour's effort on Urido's part, the fellow consented to speak freely.

And here is the story that he told me of happenings in Tabu.

CHAPTER III.

PUG-LY-GUG-LO'S STORY.

THE following recital was interpreted for me from the guttural jargon of Pug-ly-gug-lo's speech by Urido, but I will not attempt to give it in Urido's jumbled English:

"My name is Pug-ly-gug-lo, and of all the Tabians am I the greatest."

Urido added his opinion of this statement by giving a sneer; but I will credit Urido with at least trying to give an accurate interpretation of Pug-ly-gug-lo's talk.

"I am the only son of King Gig-Gig, ruler of Gutto Tabu, and rightful ruler of all Tabu."

Again Urido added a sneer to the sentence, and Pug-ly-gug-lo glared at him. I wondered at this side-play. It was some time later that the explanation was to come my way, and then only after I had landed on Tabu, and learned some of the political history of the island from Urido himself.

"Rightful ruler of all the Tabians," repeated Pug-ly-gug-lo, and as he looked sharply at Urido I imagined that the repetition was for his especial benefit. "Yes, and he could muster three thousand spears to his defense," added the prince of Tabu with a proud gleam in his eye.

"Umph!" Urido grunted, and he carefully emphasized the 'could' for my attention.

"Never mind the comment, Urido," I said, "but get along with the story."

"I have a sister, Pylanpin, a girl of marriageable age. She is slender and willowy, like the bending cane; but strong and able, as a good woman should be. And she is good to look at.

"She knows when men would be alone, and leaves when they talk of matters of the people, which is as it should be. She has hunted with me, my sister; and I have seen her run a deer to cover, she is so fast on her feet. Yes, and her only fault—she ran the animal down, then I had to kill it—she would not, for she looked into its eyes, and then she turned away. And she cried when I killed it. I have tried my best to get this one weakness from her, but it is her only fault."

He said this in a manner that implied that he would apologize for her.

"She is my sister; as her brother I like her, even with her fault. She has not married, for as yet we have not decided who among the young warriors of the head men is of good enough family."

Urido was listening eagerly and translating hurriedly that he might hear more. I was impatient that Pug-ly-gug-lo should get past the family history and give me some news regarding the reported whites who were rumored trouble-makers.

"On the island is a bad man. He has caused us much trouble. His name is Biggo. He is like the snake. He is two-tongued, and—"

But here Urido showed sign of great agitation. He glared at the speaker all through the first part of the sentence, and smiled wisely when the bad man's name was spoken. But when the bad man was referred to as a snake and two-faced fellow, he jumped to his feet, and if I had not quickly intervened there would have been a continuance of the fight that these two started on the beach.

"Sit down, Urido!" I ordered. "Like that," and I pushed him down on the floor on his haunches. "There is something more important than your personal quarrel, and I want to hear what the man has to say."

"But he lies—he lies!" Urido very plainly spoke his thought. "I know Biggo, he's not two-tongued; he's a big chief."

"Very well. Tell our friend here that we will quit the personal comment, but get along with the story," I said.

Urido said something to the fellow, and, with an impatient grunt, he continued:

"Biggo, he thinks he should rule all Tabu. My father does well in Gutto Tabu. My people liked my father. Biggo got together a thousand spears and attacked us. Biggo surrounded us and cut off over half our men, who live outside the town of Gutto.

"Biggo came in the dark hour. My people do not expect him, for my father likes peace, and does not look for war. The fight is hard. The fight is bloody. Many spears fall to rise no more, and things looked bad for my father.

"Then my father called me from the fight, and we talked with the head men of the village. We were in the big house down by the water, and we got nowhere with our talk. Just when we had decided to go back and die fighting, I looked out on the water and saw a white man's ship.

"It had sailed into the bay while we fought, and none were there to see. A boat was coming ashore. In it were two white men. I went to meet them with a hope that they might have some of the white man's talk that would help us get the best of Biggo.

"Biggo pressed our men hard. The two white men came ashore to where I stood ready to receive them. I did not like their looks. One called himself Selig Bremen and the other Gustav Reiker.

"'What do you want?' I asked them in my native tongue. They did not understand. And as I could not talk to them and get any plan, I used my hands and took them to where they could see the battle.

"With my hands I tried to talk. They understood. But they didn't seem to want to do anything at first. Then the fellow Bremen seemed to get an idea, for he spoke to the other fellow, and they went down to their boat.

"Before leaving the beach they made me understand that they would come back. But if they had no help for us I didn't want them back, for you know we have a law that says no white man shall land and stay on Tabu.

"But these two had seen with their eyes what was going on, and they made me understand by motions of their hands and bodies that they wanted to help. I watched them carefully to see what they meant to do, and they went aboard their ship again.

"They put something in the boat, and came to the beach with it. It was a long iron stick, bigger around than a fish spear. This they set up on three legs; then one man, Bremen, sat on the two back legs, and, looking along the stick, he did something that made it spit fire faster than I can spit betel juice.

"In a grove of coconuts where they pointed it the trees began falling, as if a hundred men swung bolos and hacked them down. I was afraid at first; I wish I had been more afraid, and sent the men away then.

"'What do you want for helping us with your wonderful tree-cutter?' I asked, for I knew that if this thing would cut down trees, it would do the same for men.

"'We want pearls for this,' they let me understand.

"I got them pearls—great big, many-colored pearls, such as are found only at Tabu. And their eyes bulged out at the sight. They were greedy, and wanted me to give more.

"I had taken them from the king's own,

and they were of the best. I told them no, that these were all that we had. It was a lie, but there was much that white men want in the handful that I showed them. There were enough, I believe, to buy a big, white man's ship.

"I did not like the look in the men's eyes when they talked together about the pearls. Finally the man called Bremen turned to me, and with a shrewd look he showed me that they were willing to help us. Then I gave him the pearls. It would have been much better had I thrown them into the sea, for from that time on I noticed that the fellow Bremen treated us all as if we were slaves and there merely to do his bidding.

"My father was glad to get help from any source, and when he saw the white man's fire-spitter turned on the ranks of the besieging men from Biggo's country, he was overjoyed, and was willing to give any concession to the men who were so easily able to turn defeat into victory, and save Gutto village.

"For at the first spitting of the thing one whole company of the enemy fell, as does the rice before the reaper's knife. The rest of Biggo's men were afraid and fled."

Urido grunted disbelief at this last remark, and Pug-ly-gug-lo grinned with satisfaction as he said it. But I raised my hand to get them to call it off for the present and go ahead with the story, for they were on the verge of again starting an argument on personal interests.

"'What can I do for you to show how much we feel we owe you for this timely help?' my father asked Bremen when the fight was finished, and our men had come in with the assurance that the enemy had fled from our side of Tabu.

"'It is only what we could do to any who would rise up against us,' Bremen made us understand. And even then this seemed to me to carry a two-tongued meaning.

"I should have given it more heed. But I could not say nay when the king granted them the freedom of the island.

"They moved into a hut next our own, and although the king's big hut was right beside them, every day they would do something that was insolent and that they knew to be against my father's wishes. It was very hard for me to go near them without wanting to draw my bolo and hack their sneering mouths from their heads.

"And they were always wanting to know what was done with the pearls that my father received from the divers as the king's share of the catch.

"I did not tell them. My sister did not tell them. My father could not tell them, and they kept on sneering in the king's face before his people.

"The people saw, and they were not as obedient as before the white men came. Little things insubordinate began to show more frequently. They would not go at my command as readily as was their wont.

"I heard some of the young men talking. The white men were learning the language, and could talk to the people. The young men were talking of war, and what they could do if they had the fire-spitter on their side.

"I became alarmed, for my father is a peaceful king, and much opposed to the training of young men in arms; so I spoke to my father about the disquiet showing among the young men. He, however, had not yet noticed anything out of the way.

"'Remember what they did for us,' he said in reproof when I suggested that we find a way to get the white men off of the island.

"After that it went from bad to worse, and before long the bad condition was brought forcibly to my father's attention. And in this way:

"It came time for the pearl-divers to come in from the reefs with the season's catch of pearls, and my father sent me as the one to pick for him one pearl from the catch of each diver. As usual, I went to the beach and met the divers when they came from their canoes.

"Of each one I demanded the toll. They laughed at me. I drew my bolo and slew ten, each neatly and with one blow only to sever the head. The rest fled.

"But they came back. And the white men were with them. I knew it was useless to try and best them by myself, and I knew it were better my father knew of this

mutiny as soon as possible; so I went to my father's (the king) hut.

"I told him what had happened. Then we knew well what a mistake we had made. We called for our spearmen. None but a handful came to our side. All of our younger men had gone over to the white men's ranks. Bremen had treacherously undermined our authority until he had us down with hardly a struggle.

"Our hut was attacked. With the handful who were loyal we fought hard. My father, the king, even though of peace-loving disposition, was so angered at Bremen and the people who had deserted him that he fought like a fiend.

"My father and my sister were taken prisoners. I fought hard, but was forced away from the side of my family. I got away to the mountain with the help of a faithful man. But we were hunted out.

"My man was killed. I was wanted that I might be tortured as an example to the other Tabians that they must do Bremen's bidding. I got into a canoe and came here."

Indeed it was plain to me that there was trouble ahead—and that a lot had gone before—on the island of Tabu. My ideas of a vacation trip were all shot to the four winds. But also I saw that my duty lay very clearly in that one direction.

I had to go on to Tabu now. Possibly there would be a chance that I could persuade these white fellows that they were not needed on the island any more. I could do no less than buckle on my bolo and automatic and try.

Also I could see very clearly where this story must not be repeated where my wife might hear, or my chance of getting ashore on Tabu would be indeed mighty small. For, somehow, she didn't seem to realize that I'm a mild-mannered man, and will avoid violence always, except where it is forced upon me by the other fellow not listening to reason; then it's only left for me to do my little bit in as efficient a manner as I am able.

It was certain that this man Pug-ly-gug-lo could be very useful to me in the coming trip, and that he and Urido must be kept away from each other or I might be out of luck. So I conceived the idea of putting it up to Urido.

"Urido," I said, "you have heard the story from the mouth of Pug-ly-gug-lo. For some reason you seem to have a hard feeling for the man. Now, I am going to Tabu to see if I can help get rid of these two bad men."

Urido's eyes snapped with excitement. By no other sign did he show that he was particularly interested in the trip. But by this infallible sign I knew that he, too, wanted to go.

"Now, Urido, you want to go, too," I said, and he shook his head vigorously in the affirmative. "Well, Pug-ly-gug-lo here will be necessary to us on that trip on his island, and I place him in your safe keeping until such time as I may give you permission to go ahead with your personal quarrel."

"Umph!" he grunted, but he was giving the matter thought. Finally he spoke:

"I, Urido, will see that nothing of harm comes to Pug-ly-gug-lo until Alonzo, my friend, says we are through with him. My friend Alonzo asks it, it is so."

And he stood rigidly at attention before me as he said it. He meant it, and I had faith.

"All right, Urido; take him ashore now, and both of you be in readiness to leave as soon as I shall be ready myself, which will not be long. We will go on the Patience Standish to Tabu."

CHAPTER IV.

TABU.

I HELD up my wife's trip to Hong-Kong for two weeks while I got myself in condition to make the attempt I intended to make—to go Captain Flanders one better, and not only get information of the whites on Tabu, but to rid the island of these intruders as well.

I had learned by experience with different native tribes that I could make a better entry into their country if I get myself up as one of them. And this is not hard for me to do, as I am naturally very dark of skin and I was raised as a Chimoro youth,

without the hindrance of clothes and out of doors.

Being over six feet tall, and at home in breech-clout and barefooted, I can get acquainted in most of these aboriginal tribes without attracting more than ordinary curiosity in myself, for they accept me as one of themselves. On this trip I figured that, even if the natives were mostly blacks, I had seen that some were of lighter hue, like Pug-ly-gug-lo. Urido, Pug-ly-gug-lo, and I would make a very good combination as natives, and our color would not be so very much different after I had exposed myself to the bright rays of the tropical sun for a fortnight.

I might say for myself, I am named Alonzo Gregory; my father was an American sea captain, who lost his ship and was taken prisoner by a cannibal tribe on an island near Guam, along with his wife and a Chimoro maid whom they had employed in Guam.

I was born while my parents were undergoing torture at the hands of the cruel fiend who had them in his power, a black named Allatambour. The Chimoro maid, Marie Zuribar, escaped and picking me up on the ocean, where I had been set adrift in a small boat because of superstitious dread on Allatambour's part, she made her way to Guam, where she brought me up as her own son.

All of this I later found out when I made a trip in my capacity of constabulary officer to the island where Allatambour held forth for the purpose of doing away with him. I was successful. In that adventure I discovered my identity, met my wife, and acquired wealth.

In preparing for this trip to Tabu my greatest trouble was in trying to make my wife understand that it was all right for me to go onto this troubled isle, but that it would not be equally right for her to go.

"My dear," I would say, "I am not entering into any expedition of unusual danger," and I would try to make it sound convincing.

"Well, if that's the case, then I don't see why I can't go, too," she would come back at me.

"Yes, but, my dear, you don't understand. You see, it is all right for a man to do these things; but for a woman, well, it isn't right," and I would end lamely every time. "You see, with your finer instincts as a lady, it would never do," I would say.

And I couldn't tell her the real reason for not wanting her along—that I sensed real danger and good fighting in this trip—for if I did tell her that, she would put her foot down and not let me go at all.

"I know you don't want me," she would then say. "It's because there 'll be some grave danger for you to face, and you think I'll be in the way or unable to stand it; and I believe that you're going with the direct intent of picking a fight with one of those horrid white men that I hear about—and you'll get hurt, and—" Then she'd make it very uncomfortable for me by sobbing and wind up with: "And maybe get—get—get killed!"

Then I'd take her in my arms and try to soothe her and speak to her like this:

"You wrong me, dear. When will you realize that I am a mild-mannered man and avoid physical violence, except where it is forced upon me? Really, my dear, you shock me with your opinion of me."

"Yes, I know how you always avoid the violence; but there's always a fight whenever you go out after a man, and—and—and some one gets hurt."

"Well, I only carry scars," I reminded her.

"Yes—yes; but the other fellows, some don't—they're dead! And it might be—be—be you next time!" she sobbed out.

"There! There, my dear! Don't you worry. I'm still very much alive, and I intend to stay that way," I said to soothe her. "Yes, even if I have to leave some others who won't carry any scars," I muttered, and much to my regret she heard me.

"Huh! I knew you were looking for a fight!" she burst forth. "I knew that you were looking for a fight!"

Then I did have my hands full getting her to consent to my going.

However, after two weeks spent almost naked, swimming, canoeing, and fishing on the reef, I was hardened, browned, and ready to start for Tabu.

The constabulary of Guam gave me an old, dilapidated whale-boat that had long before been surveyed and cast aside by them as unfit for sea duty. I had a use for it, and my future plans would hinge around that old whale-boat.

With it swung from the davits at the Patience Standish's after-rail we sailed out of Guam, cleared for Hong-Kong, but with the intention of dropping Pug-ly-gug-lo, Urido, and me off at Tabu in the old whale-boat.

The trip was uneventful up to the time the ship hove-to at night close under the shadow of Tabu's frowning mountain and the three of us men, who were to make the short distance from the ship to the shore in the surveyed boat, were ready to leave.

I had already placed my automatic pistol, a box of a thousand rounds of ammunition, my bolo, and the weapons of the other two men in the stern-sheets of the boat. All of these things we had wrapped carefully in oiled silk, and arranged with wooden buoys so they would float in case the boat gave out before we reached the beach.

My wife, Patience, had been in a nervous state of worry during the whole hundred-mile run from Guam, and now, in the early morning darkness—it was about 2 A.M.—she clung to me sobbing and loath to let me go.

The boat was swung out and ready to lower. Her nerve-taut brain conceived all manner of troubles ahead, to which I had not even given a thought.

"I must go now, dear," I said and I felt a lump rise up in my throat.

"I wish you weren't going," she said with a sob in her voice. And for two cents I believe I would have turned the whole trip down, she was so earnestly dreading it. Maybe her woman's intuition forewarned her of some of the awful horrors I would go through on this adventure.

But I collected myself, and steeling my sentiment at this, our first parting, I bid her farewell.

Her father took her in his arms.

"Good luck, Alonzo, boy!" he called after me as we were lowered away in the whale-boat.

"Good luck, Alonzo, *my boy*," I heard a musical voice call, and my sad thoughts left me, for my wife had risen to the occasion; and as I looked up to the deck I saw her shining face dimly lit by the flickering stern-light and she smiled bravely at me. I blew her a kiss from my finger-tips, and we shoved off.

Many times during my stay at Tabu I wondered if I was ever to see her sweet face again. Even at this early stage of my trip I remember a faint thought to that effect. The story Pug-ly-gug-lo had told was indicative of grave dangers ahead.

However, this was the last time I saw my wife during this adventure, so that takes her out of the story.

As we in the boat dropped astern of the Patience Standish I could hear my father-in-law call out an order to the crew, and that peaceful ship on the quiet sea became as a living thing. From a gracefully dipping float on the swells she became active, ropes hummed through singing blocks, sails flapped, and men ran about her decks; then she heeled to the light breeze, a swirl of eddying waters trailed off astern, and dimly I could see the white, curling wave under her forefoot.

She was under way, and quickly she blended into the darkness and became first a mere blur then a nothingness in the night. As she disappeared I could not but think of man's flight through life, still and peaceful in calm surroundings to start, then all activity as maturity is reached, ending finally, and becoming so soon a mere blur in the thoughts of those left behind. The Patience Standish had sailed out of my experiences around Tabu.

Dully I could make out a black mass off our port side, which I knew to be the island of Tabu and our goal. To Pug-ly-gug-lo I left the duty of piloting the boat through the sharp reefs encircling this volcanic pile.

And while he steered our leaky, creaky old craft toward a white line of breakers that stood out sharply in contrast to the black of the land I looked toward the island, and my thoughts were of my possibilities on this venture in a land where white men had been forbidden and those who had gained leave to stay had taken foul advantage of their hosts.

A very ragged sky-line was presented for my searching eyes. From the south the sea and soil merged into an undefined margin which by gradual ascent mounted to a peak. This peak was the southernmost rim of the great crater of Ugluee, which is the Tabian name for the volcano, and from this point a much-notched ridge, showing blacker than the dark sky, ran northward, and was only relieved by a sharply defined, deep split in the wall which lay just before us, and was about the center of the surface that we could see.

The northern extremity of the island was very similar to the southern, for the gradual descent of the line of black mountains finally seemed to slip hazily into the sea. The slope was festooned near the water with coconut fronds, while farther up heavier timber gave me a silhouette fringing the bare crater-crest like the hair around a bald man's head.

The whole island *en masse* looked very much as if it had been placed before us in a great bulk; then the near side had been torn apart that we might imagine what the interior would be like, for the deep gash in the mountainside was right in front of us, and I kept feeling that if I could only stand a little higher I might see the floor of the crater, with a possible lake within.

And there is a lake of a kind there, of which I gained bitter and painful knowledge; but I knew nothing of it as I looked from the old whale-boat at the island. It is a lake the like of which I have never seen, nor have I ever heard of a similar one—but I am digressing.

My attention was drawn to something of closer interest. My bare feet were in water. Our poor boat was leaking too badly for Urido to keep it free with a bucket bailer. Indeed, I might compare the old tub to a sieve with a very thin sheet of tissue-paper over it to keep out the water, and as if when the paper became wet and decomposed it fell away. Such, in a way, was our predicament, for after a poor job of calking we had painted a coat of white lead on the outer side of our craft, and the boards, weakened by plain rot, were shedding paint and opening seams at every heave of the sea.

And our sail, full with the morning wind and tugging at the mast, was no kind of helper in our trouble, for its extra strain on the floor boards was tearing the bottom out of the poor thing we used as a boat.

It was not that the danger of getting wet worried any of us, for we were all, as natives should be, bare to the skin and wearing only breech-clouts. And we were all as much at home in the water as humans can be; so the two miles or so to the shore held no terrors for us.

But I had a use for the old hulk, and felt that I must get it to the beach.

"Let go your sheet and halyards!" I softly called to Urido. I spoke very quietly, for we had no desire to announce our presence to the islanders until we were ready. It would be better to be safely landed first, I thought.

"Umph!" Urido grunted in disgust, for he was a lazy fellow at times, particularly when any physical labor shows; but give him a legitimate fight, and he has more energy than three ordinary men; whether the fight be man to man or merely a contest in sport, he surely goes in to win.

He now saw the prospect of manning an oar.

But Pug-ly-gug-lo was so quick to let go the sheet, not waiting for the laggard Urido to even reach out for it, that I wondered. Then I thought of his eagerness to get home and help his people, and realized why he was such a willing worker. And he saw the water coming in faster than a baler could handle it, which was self-explanatory of my order.

We manned the oars—Urido and I—while Pug-ly-gug-lo took the helm and steered toward the deep cut in the mountain, as there was an opening in the reef directly in line with it. It was a narrow channel, used only by canoes, but he had told me that it was deep enough for us to get the boat in.

And straight in shore was a good place for Pug-ly-gug-lo to land, for here the jungle grew down to the sand, and he could disappear into it immediately when we beached the boat.

It would be too much like signing his own death warrant for him to be found by

any of Bremen's guards. And it might not be any too pleasant for Urido and I to be found in his company. As it was we felt that it would be enough to explain our being there without having him to add to our difficulties.

The roar of the beating surf on the rocky reef barrier was strong in our ears, and if we had not been accustomed to such terrifying noise, I dare say we would have had a serious dread of the passage through the channel, which led directly into the turmoil of waters.

But we had confidence in the experienced guidance of our pilot, and we all had been brought up where coral reefs were popular fishing grounds and a place of daily visit.

As Urido and I sat and rowed, with Pug-ly-gug-lo bending forward from his perch in the stern, hand on tiller, peering sharply ahead to be sure and make a true entry into the narrow waterway between the jagged shell-stone on either side, I could feel the stern lift slightly.

By this sign I knew that we were getting into the foot-hills of the mountainous range of seas that pounded endlessly at the fish-built wall.

I wondered if the frail craft under us would stand up to the strain of twists and turns, the tossing and buffeting of the rollers we would soon be fighting. Not that it made much difference whether it did or not, for the shore was only about half a mile beyond the reef. My only regret would be if we could not get the wreckage on the beach, for I had a use to make of it.

But there was very little time to give to my personal thoughts. From a gentle rising of the stern as the lesser waves passed under us we were soon more rudely hoisted aloft and rushed forward, as if we were racing with the water alongside to see which could get over the rocky bottom first.

And the wave always won, for our weighty boat dragged back badly, and it took all the power that Urido and I could muster on the oars to keep her headed with the sea. Each of us had a twelve-foot oar of seasoned ash, and stood with our feet braced against the ribs and our knees against the thwarts, facing forward.

With heavy sweeps of these sturdy blades we fought the twisting of the cross-currents. If the gunwale and bottom stayed in our boat, we would clear the reef all fine and dandy.

We were in the midst of a turbulent, bubbling, churning maelstrom, with our bow striving to obey the tug of one erratic current, while our stern wanted equally to go another way. And do what we could, the boat merely shook itself like an irritated wild thing and wilfully started on a course of its own. The result was a most disconcerting whirl.

I reached far back with my oar, and dipping carefully to get a full blade-sweep, I threw my whole weight on the loom in an effort to stop the dizzy spin. Then suddenly a twelve-inch section of the rotten gunwale came away with a jerk.

I sprawled ahead over the thwart and brought up against Urido's straining leg. The unexpectedness of my jolt against his taut muscles doubled him down on top of me.

But the great surge I had given on the oar before the gunwale gave had done the trick, and we shot out of the whirlpool into smooth foam-covered water within the reef.

Urido piled off of me and we got up, laughing. Pug-ly-gug-lo was doubled up in the stern, rolling in silent mirth. I thought he'd get a whole lot more good out of a laugh if he could let it out, but that was not his way. He seemed content and to enjoy keeping it in, only letting the muscular ripples and contortions interpret his feelings.

However much humor there might have been in the situation it was soon displaced by a sense of something wrong. I was standing in water which came over my ankles. And it was fast getting deeper.

The rotting wood of the decrepit craft had stood all of the strain that it could, and if any sudden jar should be given it in its precarious condition, nothing but driftwood would float in on the tide. But as it was important that even the pieces must be on the sand when we were, I planned accordingly.

"Over the side we go!" I whispered to Urido; and we went over the gunwale Pug-ly-gug-lo followed suit, and we three

urged the half-submerged wreck toward the line of shadow that marked our goal. It was slow swimming with the heavy thing.

The water was very warm, even of a higher temperature than of the water in neighboring Guam. This surprised me. But when I recalled reading somewhere of the volcanic nature of the island of Tabu, and how frequently seismic disturbances visited the place, I understood better how this internal volcanic heat from the island could be felt in the water just as happens in the cooling jackets about condensing tubes, Gatling guns, and the like.

And this island could readily be compared to a tremendous repeating cannon on account of its frequent discharges of white-hot gases and lava from the yet active volcano which occupies the whole central portion of the land.

We got ashore just as light was chasing the gloom from the east. While we swam Pug-ly-gug-lo had been telling Urido our position on the island, and I could hear that able interpreter of mine receiving the information with frequent impatient grunts, as if it were an old story to him.

And the short wave that finally sent us to the narrow drift of sand finished for our boat. The poor thing simply gave up. It seemed to feel that it had reached its last resting-place, and, satisfied, it gave a parting groan before collapsing on the sand, all spread out like an exhausted thing.

Urido looked at it and grinned. The morning light shone on his cheerful face, and any one seeing him would hardly think that he had met with any catastrophe.

"Look sad, you poor fish!" I warned him as I peered cautiously about us to see if by any chance we were observed. No one was in sight.

Then I had Urido and Pug-ly-gug-lo carry our weapons and ammunition into the jungle near by, where they concealed them in a bush. I kept only a little stiletolike kris that would slip unnoticed into my loin-band and nestle there for an emergency. And I had learned the trick of drawing it and lunging so that, like a snake's darting tongue and striking fangs, it would prick the skin and go home in a flash.

"Now, Pug-ly-gug-lo, you beat it!" I said; for it would indeed be suicide for us to be caught with him. "And remember, if nothing prevents, this will be our meeting-place in the dark hour before day."

Urido told him what I said and Pug-ly-gug-lo slipped into the bordering heavy growth of ironwood and brush.

We stood on the sand of a narrow beach that extended around a crescent bay which was protected far out by the coral reef, which in turn encircled the whole island. When we passed through the reef we had made a change in our course, so now we were at the southernmost point of the bay and we could see, where the notch in the mountain opened above the center of the crescent, a village extending down to the water.

Coconut-palms made a pleasing setting all along the beach and a matted jungle of vines, ironwood and other brush grew luxuriantly close to the ground.

It was fortunate for us that Pug-ly-gug-lo went when he did, for he had no more than disappeared into the bush then I saw an excited crowd coming toward us from the village.

"Quick, Urido! Tell me how we stand on the island, before these people get here," I whispered.

"North point there," he said, pointing to the far point of the bay, where one side of the frowning volcano sloped to the sea. "South point here," and he motioned toward the near side of the bay and volcano which towered above our heads.

"Gutto Village there," and he pointed to the town in the center of the crescent. "King Gig-Gig lives there and white men there, too," thus he told me in few words what it had taken Pug-ly-gug-lo at least fifteen minutes to tell him.

The people from the village were nearing.

"Look sad, as if you'd lost your best friend!" I growled into Urido's ear that he might get rid of the cheerful look he had. And he did remarkably well. Any one not acquainted with him might readily think that he was returning from the grave of his most cherished loved one when he let his eyes take in the collapsed boat, then the people near by.

I looked as forlorn as I could. And as I realized the necessity I didn't hesitate to put every latent power of acting into it that I might have in me.

Leading the crowd of some twenty natives, all black, bushy-haired, and dirty, was a short, slender white man. He wore a much-greased pongee suit and an old Panama straw, from under which a fringe of long, black hair hung in disarray.

His coat-tails were flopped about by the weighty automatic pistol that swung from a belt around his waist. He appeared even more unkempt than the rabble at his heels. He shuffled as he walked as if something were wrong with one foot.

I afterward learned that there was a defective development in his right foot. Apparently he was very conscious of this deformity, for he was constantly shifting himself about when in front of any one so that he might stand with the malformed foot in back of the other to hide it—he always seemed to be at parade rest when standing.

This white man had the vilest features I have ever had to look upon. All that could be bestial in a human seemed to be written in small and crisscrossed lines in his face.

His small, close-set, piglike eyes gleamed forth viciously and the crafty creases encircling them were prominent as he peered at us with an appraising squint. His skin was a pasty-white and hung loosely on his face, as if it had been stretched and had lost the elastic power to return to place.

He was pock-marked. His thick lips curled into a sneer, showing the brutality of his mouth as he looked us over and if his flattened nose could have done it more than nature had already done, it would have turned up in contempt at finding what appeared to be two stray natives stranded on the beach.

He carried a length of limber rattan in his hand. I was to learn before the sun was much higher why the stick was with him.

A black man was walking by the white man's side as they drew near, and this black was gesticulating and very likely telling how he had discovered us. I wondered when he first saw us and if he had seen Pug-ly-gug-lo.

Urido's head was bent toward the ground, as if he were embarrassed by the stare of the people. But I saw by the intent look on his face that he was listening to the black man's story.

"He didn't see Pug-ly-gug-lo," Urido whispered in my ear, much to my relief.

The white man—I learned to know him as Selig Bremen—shoved the black from him roughly and roared at us in Tabu.

"Don't answer to that language," I warned Urido.

"No sabe!" I said out loud for Bremen.

"Get you gone from here!" he yelled next in English.

It was a shocking reception for shipwrecked men and I tried to seem very much surprised when I answered him. I pointed to the pieces of our boat distributed on the sand, I hoped that the mute expressive condition of our craft would be our best excuse to stay.

That had been my reason for bringing the old boat. But I underestimated the brutality of Bremen.

CHAPTER V.

PYLANPIN.

"WE put in here, sir, when our boat became too leaky to be safe at sea," I answered in as respectful a manner as I could and still look into that ugly face.

"Well, get in it again and get out!" was the rude response.

"But, sir!" And I tried to make my voice seem servile as an awed native might. "Our boat, it met with accident," and I pointed at the wreck.

"What!" he roared. "Wrecked—and on my island! What do you mean by bringing your old trash and littering my beach with it?" he broke out in a fury. "What're you goin' to do with it?" And he stuck his pock-marked face out at us menacingly.

I stepped back a pace to seem duly impressed by his attitude as I could see that he intended that we should be thoroughly frightened.

"We—we," and I assumed a stutter to carry out my part, but I fingered the handle

of my kris, for I had his number, as Captain Jack would say, and I itched to use the weapon on this fellow. "We—we would like to fix it here—if we can, sir?" I finished.

"Such insolence—such insolence I have never seen. You would fix it, would you—and I suppose next you'll be begging materials from me to fix it with!"

He was working himself into a frenzy. He hopped around on his one good foot and thrashed the air with the rattan stick. I looked at Urido and could see the red blood of a fighting man mounting to his face.

"Easy, boy—easy, boy," I whispered a warning to him. "We've got to take what comes for a while—it's for the best, so hold in, boy," I told him.

But, really how much better it would have been to have used my kris at that time or let Urido go at him—it would have saved us much trouble and agony later.

I watched the man's foolish rage and antics with considerable internal amusement and a disgust at his lack of control, but with no idea that he would strike either of us with the rattan whip which he brandished so threateningly over our heads.

"Such insolence!" he roared. And the blacks edged away from his vicinity and eyed the flaying stick with dread. Some of the more timid actually cowered as the man worked up to added fury and I wondered if possibly they had tasted of the sting of that lash.

"Lay a hold of these insolent puppies!" screamed Bremen as he suddenly turned upon the frightened blacks and struck out among them to hurry their laggard feet.

Six of the biggest men—and none were under six feet in height—rushed forward at their master's bidding and grappled with us.

"Best not put up a fight, Urido, take what comes quietly," I urged my man, not, however, without misgivings, for I was fearful of his temper when put to the test. And if he should start to give his opponents real action, the three who volunteered to hold him would find that they had the biggest contract they ever tackled.

I was proud of Urido, for he contained himself admirably. And I was also sincerely sorry for him, more so than for myself, at what happened immediately after we allowed ourselves to be easily held. But it seemed the policy for us to be submissive—it did then, but I wish I might have known a little more of the man we were against.

"I'll learn you to be so insolent on my island and who's master here!" shouted Bremen, advancing on us with rattan raised to strike. He did strike. Twenty lashes fell across my bare back before he stopped to take a breathing-spell, for he was not a strong man and it winded him badly just whipping me.

I did not give him the satisfaction of seeing that the blows hurt, even though the blood was trickling down my back when he finished.

I looked toward Urido as Bremen let up on me. Two of the men who had been holding him were sprawling on the ground where he had thrown them and the third was about to be hurled over Urido's head in a backhand grip that I taught Urido myself.

"Urido!" I yelled, fearful lest he spoil the chance we had of staying on Tabu, and after my going through all of the humiliation of letting that degenerate Bremen whip me, too. Urido stopped in the act of giving the man the final heave that would have sent him through the air for a bad fall far away on the sand.

"Take your medicine like a man, Urido, it's our only chance!" I warned him in Spanish.

"But, you, Alonzo, my friend, I couldn't stand by and see you beat!" the loyal fellow argued, also speaking in Spanish.

"It's all right, Urido, thank you. But it's your turn now, and I've got to stand by, too. It's going to be hard for me to see a friend get such a lashing, but I think it's our only chance, dear friend.

"Show him what a real man can stand and not whimper for it!" I said, and it hurt to sentence such a friend to a menial punishment without a struggle.

"I'm that man!" was all that Urido said.

And by the determined look on his face I knew that all was well and that he would not only not make a sign of his pain during

the ordeal, but that he would foster a deep-seated craving for a speedy revenge on the author of this indignity.

I had seen him once before when he held such a grudge and it became a mania with him that was only curable when he knew the fiend who had caused him grief was put out of the way for good and all. Urido had the hot blood of the Pacific Islander and he made a very bad enemy, but a most loyal friend.

"You would resist the acts of your superiors, would you? I'll learn you better!" bellowed Bremen to the now quiet Urido. However, Bremen kept at a respectful distance for the look of contempt shining in Urido's eyes made him quake.

"Here, you skulking dogs, grab this man—don't you see that he's freed himself?" And he drove unwilling reenforcements up to help hold Urido while he administered the whipping.

"Come and give your beating," Urido said with dignity as he brushed three more of the husky blacks from him.

But Bremen would not go near him until he was in other men's hands. He shrieked for some real men to come forward and hold this "miscreant" who would dare defy him.

Then Urido let himself be held. Bremen, seeming satisfied that my man was secured beyond chance of attempting physical violence against him, laid on with a will. The men holding me became interested and relaxed their grasps on my arm.

Urido stood there, a martyr, for he did not even wince, so far as I could see, and the welts sprung up on his bare back like rings of white rope lashing him about. Then at another blow these taut welts would crack.

The skin would part. The raw flesh would show. Then the red blood would come to the surface—slowly oozing at first, for the blood was beaten from the part, then with a gush as the arteries regained their normal elasticity.

I fingered the handle of my dirk. I raised the knife half from the cloth that concealed it at my loin. I would put a stop to this brutality for once and all.

But Bremen became tired when he had delivered the same number of blows on Urido's back that he had on mine. I was indeed glad to see him draw away from my friend, for I could have contained myself no longer. I had my kris in my hand and was getting crouched to spring forward.

But the fiend stopped. I straightened and jerked my hand to my loin-cloth to again hide the knife. Suddenly my hand was clutched in a strong grip and another hand flicked the weapon from my grasp.

My guards had recovered their interest in me before I had realized that they were yet there. The glistening blade fell shimmering in the sand right at Bremen's feet. For a moment I thought our chances were spoiled for all time.

"Ah, ha!" Bremen muttered as he picked the little deadly thing up. "So!" he said with a sort of whistle. Then he slipped the knife in his own belt and, giving me a crafty look, turned to the guards and ordered:

"Take them to Gutto!" I knew what he said from his motion, even though he spoke in Tabu.

As we were marched past him on the way to the village he walked beside me for a ways.

"You two are good men," he said, and the brute cast an envious glance from Urido's splendid physique to mine. "I've learned you who's master here—remember—I'll not be crossed. When I will anything it is done.

"You and this man," and he indicated Urido with a nod of his head, "I'll learn you more—I'll learn you!" And he passed on ahead to lead the procession, giving me a knowing glance as he went.

I didn't grasp his full meaning just then—but I assure you it was unfolded to me fast enough once he got started "learning us." As it seemed to me while we walked toward Gutto Village I thought we had gained our end and were on the island securely—even if we were prisoners made very little difference for a while, at least until I had time to get the lay of the land.

Urido and I walked side by side. Urido held himself erect with a dignity that would have well fitted a king of such a place. I felt more like laying down and nursing my wounds, but if my brown man could yet

go it so strong—well, I wasn't going to be a quitter.

As we marched, in a more or less disorderly procession, along the upper reaches of the narrow beach, the sun's rays came across the broad Pacific to where we followed the brute Bremen, as if to show us that there was light yet left to the world, if a person would but see.

And this bright, clean light seemed to bother Bremen, for he hastened his pace as he looked with annoyance toward the sun. Apparently he preferred darkness in the world. He turned from the brightness of the day into the gloom of the jungle—and the way was more difficult by reason of the low-creeping vines and path-encroaching brush.

We were kept at a distance from this domineering white man by the guards—the same fellows who had held us while Bremen whipped. They seemed to stand in awesome terror of the man. He seemed to rule them by creating a fear of him among them and all of those subservient.

He apparently thought that Urido and I were properly cowed and that we would be like the rest. Although he walked us along peacefully enough now, I could not but have a deep-seated distrust of the fellow. Even if we were going right into Gutto Village and everything seemed to be turning in my favor I was not altogether pleased with the prospects, for I would have preferred to be free.

But I was willing to let things take their course under Bremen's guidance for a while.

As we drew near Gutto Village the groves of coconuts showed signs of cultivation. The rank jungle growth had been cleared from under their deep shade and the soil showed where it had been recently turned, although new shoots of the creeping vines and smothering, low brush appeared plentifully, which showed that the process of cultivation had been interfered with not long before.

This new lack of attention I blamed on Bremen, and rightly. For I soon learned of his disorganizing methods.

We passed a burned and devastated home-site in a grove of breadfruit-trees, then we came upon another outlying farm where the hut, which stood on a little knoll surrounded by the family rice-paddies, had been burned like the first. Urido noticed these places and grunted as if he understood their significance.

"Biggo," he said. I understood by the inference that this was the territory where the outlaw, Biggo, had been active in his siege of Gutto Village.

Then we came to a grove of coconuts that had been felled. The standing butts of their trunks were frayed at the break as if they had been chewed by some hungry animal.

"Machine gun," I whispered to my partner in trouble.

"Umph!" he grunted in assent and looked curiously at them. He had never seen the effect of a stream of bullets directed against growing wood before. He was thoroughly impressed.

Bremen stopped and motioned for us to be brought up to him. And when we were near he waved his rattan toward the felled trees and remarked with an exultant tone:

"A force of a thousand men thought they had the strength to get Selig Bremen—I learned them. They stood behind those trees. They thought they were safe from me. I willed that they should die.

"Each died as a tree fell from my bullets. That's what happens to them what opposes me—I'll learn 'em. Remember—I'll learn 'em!" And he walked on.

He made no mention of King Gig-Gig. It was against him, Selig Bremen, that these men had been fighting—so he would have us believe.

We came to a clearing in the encircling rural groves and orchards. A strip of ground one hundred yards wide had been bared of all trees, shrubs, and vines; only some short grasses that had grown up as a sort of carpet to clothe the nudeness of the soil were left.

Across this stretch was the village. Straggling streets aimlessly led into the clearing and some disappeared into the jungle. Tipa huts placed without semblance of order were scattered about the outskirts of the town as if loosely thrown from some central point and allowed to stay where they lit.

Some were right up to the edge of the street they faced, others were placed with

their entrance at an awkward angle to any natural way of approach, as if some vagary of the owner had so arranged it and no central authority had deemed it wise to change it. This was undoubtedly caused by the lax control of things that King Gig-Gig apparently had allowed during his rule.

Everything, however, had undoubtedly been kept as neat as such a place of simple savage environment might be expected to be, for on every hand the streets and paths were clearly marked and the new piles of refuse showed that they were only the small ones of recent collection around the houses. Even yet signs showed where some of the natives living in near-by huts, had, very likely from force of a good habit, made feeble attempts to clear away the accumulating trash-heaps and assume a semblance of neatness.

But good habits are more easily forgotten than the bad, and for the most part the streets were surely becoming filthy alleys and only a convenient place for kitchen refuse to be thrown. Pigs and chickens took advantage of this condition of affairs and were nosing and picking about in the muck.

These people certainly had not been a warlike, military race, or surely there would have been a stockade around the town and more means of defense showing. Yet, on thought, I wondered why there should have been more preparedness. The only enemy to peace that I knew of was Biggo and from the signs I should say that he had not been a very aggressive outlaw until recently.

Now, of course, a new menace had come into the land, but it came because of a breech of rule—the new menace had come from the inside, it might be said, for the doors had been opened through sentiment and a white man allowed residence. This white man, Bremen, was an unfortunate selection.

He led us along a path through the clearing that became a street and as he shuffled along his shifting gaze caught sight of a pretty little flower that had peered forth in the daylight to add a touch of cheerful color in this drear spot where it was much needed. Raising his rattan quickly aloft Selig Bremen swung it viciously down, and severing the frail stalk of the gentle flower sent its head, a streak of royal purple, sailing through the air.

By some strange freak of the wind gust the delicate, fluttering petals fell right into Urido's outstretched hand. Bremen, watching, saw. He paused a moment as if to reprimand Urido for catching it, then a troubled look came over his face and with an impatient toss of his head he went on his way.

"That man is superstitious," I thought as I watched his action.

From the outlying houses of the village black people came forth, timidly and haltingly. They were very curious to see the new arrivals, but there seemed a hesitancy as if they were afraid of Bremen.

As we drew near he yelled at them loudly. And they quickly backed away from our path and bowed submissively to the brute.

I was surprised at their quietness, their seeming awe of the man up ahead. Usually a crowd of blacks like this would either be very happy and full of laughter and song or vindictive and loud with jeers and jabs, accordingly whether the newcomers were friendly visitors or prisoners of war.

But these people hung back and with solemn faces silently watched us pass. Indeed, this man Bremen had brought a curse to this land that would thus change the whole nature of the inhabitants.

As we came to the more thickly populated part of the village I noticed a better order of arrangement. The huts were built around squares like city blocks. And they were so close that tipa-thatch touched tipa-thatch until the whole outer part of the squares had almost a continuous roof.

The inner part of each square was open, and I got occasional glimpses of smoke columns rising from fire-pits in places where community cooking was done.

The streets we traveled opened out ahead into a semicircular plaza. The beach at the bay was the diameter of the circle, and I surmised that here must be the pearl-market and public place of business in general.

And it was in this plaza that I expected to find the big house that Pug-ly-gug-lo had spoken of, where the elder men met to talk

of the affairs of the people. Also the royal hut and other places of importance to the natives should all be here.

My surmise was correct, for as we came from the narrow confines of the hut-lined street into the open plaza the line-up of big canoes on the beach plainly indicated fisheries and the smell—pearl fisheries.

We entered the plaza from the central and largest of the radiating streets, which, fanlike, spread from this hub. To our right was a long, low, bamboo, palm-thatched structure that occupied a whole block in length. I should say that it was at least one hundred feet long by twenty-five feet wide and the floor was not elevated as in the tipa huts around it, but the walls were held by bamboos stuck in the ground.

There were no windows. On the roof two conical cupolas were raised, one at each end of the long hut, as if for air-vents. The door to the place was in the middle of the long side facing the plaza and no other entrance or opening could I see. This was the "Big House" or place where the king held audience.

To our left and just across the street from the big house was another large hut. Finely worked split bamboo formed its walls and fronds of the plumosa palm, beautifully woven, roofed it in.

The posts upon which it was elevated about three feet from the ground were of native mahogany, and each had been hand-rubbed until the sun glittered from the hard-polished surfaces.

This hut was about fifteen feet by forty feet on the floor plan. Four hewn mahogany blocks formed steps up to the door, which was screened by a mat woven from the fine inner fiber of the coconut-palm.

The screen was of such delicate workmanship that the gentle breeze ruffled it like light cloth and the sheen of it like silk. This was King Gig-Gig's own hut.

A fresh brown spot, the shape of a war shield, showed against the weather-beaten bamboo over the door. It contrasted strongly with the bleached-out walls surrounding. The king's coat-of-arms had been recently taken down. But the mark of it had been left indelibly imprinted on the front of the hut by the hot tropical sun which had shown with equal ardor upon many generations of Tabu's rightful ruler.

And even as I looked rays of the morning sun were pointing through the overhanging palm-thatch and skipping about over the dark-brown area as if seeking for an accustomed emblem not there.

Directly in front of the royal hut was a strange thing to find in this savage community. Standing on its tripod, aiming its viperlike nose toward the sea, was a very modern machine gun. I recognized the make as American. But how foreign it appeared in such surroundings!

Natives in passing respectfully, rather fearfully, made a wide circle about it. They certainly held this spitting thing that killed men and cut down trees equally fast, in great awe. And well they might, for many of them had seen its efficient destructiveness demonstrated.

The remainder of the semicircular row of huts were the same as those we had passed coming through the town, with the exception of one, which was directly next door to the king's own. It was smaller than the royal hut, but of equal and similar workmanship, and I afterward learned that it was built by one of the king's ancestors as a guest-house for any whom the king might favor with a night's lodging.

And it had been an honor much sought among Tabians to be housed in this hut even for a night. It was in this hut that Bremen and his partner of evil were entertained when they were guests of the king. So Pug-ly-gug-lo had told me.

We were stopped in front of the king's hut and Bremen started toward the door, before he reached the heavy mahogany blocks used as steps the whole hut began to quiver as from some heavy foot treading the floor inside, then the coconut fiber curtain was roughly jerked aside, and it speaks well for the material and workmanship that it was not torn to shreds by the heavy hand that pulled on it.

A white man stepped out. It was Gustav Reikman. He might have been a brewery-wagon driver or a butcher before he arrived in Tabu, for he was big and heavy enough to fill either position.

His whole appearance was that of a barrel

in a tight-fitting khaki cover and mounted on piano-legs. On top of the mass of moving flesh was a little bullet head with small close-set eyes, which lacked the shrewdness of Bremen's. Sallow, flabby cheeks showed the unhealthy bloat of the man, who must have drunk his fill full and frequent. Atop of this was a much battered cork helmet, which settled over the pointed, round dome of a head to recline on his asslike ears.

Shifting his weight sidewise down the mahogany steps and landing both feet on the ground with many grunts of exertion he hailed Bremen.

"Well, Selig, what's all the rumpus so early this morning?" He wheezed like a leaky, steam windlass as he said it in English.

"Don't call me Selig!" irritably demanded Bremen. "Remember I'm Herr Bremen," he added. "After all I've learned you, I want you to remember that!

"I've got a couple of blacks here what I learned who to respect on this here island of mine," and Bremen looked toward Urido and me with a pleased air.

But I was not thinking of Bremen just then. I had caught sight of a much more pleasing spectacle for a man's eyes.

In the door of the guest-hut next to the king's own, was what I would call a beautiful native girl. She was not black, but a light-brown, like Urido and Pug-ly-gug-lo—or even like myself, I might add, for with two weeks of direct exposure to the sun I was as tanned as Urido was a natural brown.

I quickly decided that this girl must be Pylanpin, for she answered well to her brother's description of her, only more so. For he, being only her brother and familiar with the sight of her every day, overlooked numerous attractions that other men's eyes would immediately see.

Urido was engrossed in seeing at the same time as I. And even his stolid nature was affected by the beauty of the girl's lithesome, well-rounded form. She was dressed, as is any native girl of marriageable age, in a knee-length skirt of fine sea-grasses, and wore numerous strings of delicately tinted, small shells hung around her neck.

This array of shells so clothed her from the waist up that it lent a modesty to her appearance that is generally lacking in the average native girl. Pylanpin's hair was bushy, but at the same time not so coarse and thick as most of the women I had seen while we walked through the village, but browner, finer and waving gently in the friendly ocean breeze.

Her big, black eyes were turned full upon us. As we marched away from there at Bremen's order I watched her from the corner of my eye.

She saw the wounds of the lash on our backs and a look of compassion crossed her face. Then she turned away and entered the hut to be lost to our sight.

Bremen stood sizing us up as we walked away, very much as if we were two heads of prize cattle just added to his herd.

We were taken to the hut next beyond Pylanpin's from the royal hut. We were neighbors and I was pleased, for it might come to pass that a communication to her might be necessary after I had the politics and lay of the land better in hand.

Our lodging was a regulation native tipa hut. The conical roof of palm-thatch was enough elevated from the halved bamboo walls of our round cell for us to have a little ventilation and the floor was raised enough for the pigs to circulate freely underneath. I knew that they were there, for, through a crack in the bamboo flooring, I saw two asleep in the shade.

One of the blacks who brought us to our prison stayed out in front on guard. He first went to the rear of the place into what seemed an enclosed park—the central square inside this block of houses—which in this block was apparently reserved for the king's garden.

He went to the far side of the park, where a small stream of water ran into a little pool just inside the boundary-fence of bamboo. There he filled half a coconut-shell with water and brought it back to us.

I watched him through the cracks in our back wall. The garden was an attractive little place, and under the shade of the bordering coconuts grew bananas, breadfruit, mangoes, pineapples, creeping-yam vines and many other varieties of fruits and vegetables.

The pool of water was at the end of an open, well-kept, shell-bordered path that led from the royal hut. And, as the little pool was kept clear of growing grasses or lilies, I knew it to be for domestic purposes. Altogether, the place was restful to the eyes.

The water the guard brought us was intended for drinking purposes only, I imagine, for when we called him a few moments after he left the bowl with us to go get us another he seemed much surprised that the first supply was gone. To relieve his mind and to show for what we were using the cool liquid I demonstrated with the few drops that were left in the bowl how we had bathed our inflamed backs with it.

He was much amused and seemed to think it quite a joke that any one should use water for anything but to drink. However, he had a heart and got us all we wanted during the intense heat of the morning.

The flies were the greatest pest. Attracted to us by the fresh wounds on our backs they would crawl and stick to the raw places and in every way most persistently make life miserable for us. Knowing the danger of their disease-carrying feet I was not niggardly in the use of water as long as we were allowed to have it.

It was in the hottest part of the day, at noon, that we were denied the use of any more. Bremen, whose inquisitive ears seemed always open to hear what other people were doing, was in a particularly ugly mood. The heat, I suppose, made him even less agreeable than usual, and he heard our water splashing through the cracked bamboo floor of our prison-hut to the backs of the hogs below and immediately he sought the cause of this refreshing sound.

He went out into the garden in the rear of all of our huts and I heard him roar:

"What's the meaning of this?"

The guard answered in Tabu and I did not understand.

"Well, there'll be no more water taken into that hut to-day!" was our sentence.

And we got no more while the sun was up. After that some came to us, but again I get ahead of my story.

While Bremen was in the garden Pylanpin appeared with a bamboo bucket, on her way to the spring for water. Urido and I watched through the cracks between the bamboo in our hut.

She passed Bremen without deigning to notice him. But his coveting gaze followed her. Then he walked along behind her in a manner which boded no good for the girl.

Urido, who was angered anyway by Bremen's order about the water, began to get uneasy. When he saw the look Bremen gave Pylanpin he trembled all over with righteous wrath. And when Bremen started following the girl, Urido began feeling for loose bamboos in the hut wall.

When Pylanpin had her bucket of water at the spring she turned to start back to her own hut, but Bremen, with arms outstretched, was blocking her path.

This was the last straw for Urido. Suddenly shoving his fingers between two bamboos in the back wall of our hut he wrenched them apart and, stepping through the hole he had made, ran across the garden.

Like a cat stalking a bird, Urido's feet came down on the ground absolutely without noise. Before Bremen knew that any one was near Urido had him in his powerful arms and with a heave he tossed the white man over the high bamboo fence that shut the garden in.

Then Urido seemed to become abashed, for, without a glance at Pylanpin or a pause to hear her express gratitude for his timely assistance, he turned and came swiftly back to our prison. Clambering quickly through the hole he deftly replaced the disarranged back wall and, going over to the front part of the place, he sat on the floor in silence and gazed out of the door toward the ocean.

And while I wondered at his peculiar manner I thought I heard a happy little gurgle of laughter come from the garden and, peeking out, I saw Pylanpin refilling her bucket. As she came along the path to her hut I plainly heard her humming some cheerful native chant to herself, and she was smiling happily.

All through the sweltering afternoon Urido and I sat alternately fanning flies from each other's back! Then we'd curse the dryness of our throats. But that was

all the good it would do us, for there was no water forthcoming.

I tried to get the guard to go get us some. I made signs to him to make him understand, but to no avail. He was thoroughly afraid of Bremen.

Urido wanted to speak to him in Tabu, but I would not let him, for I felt that his knowledge of the language might stand us in good stead later on, if it were not known that he could understand it.

In the mean time I was taking a quiet course of study in the Tabian language. To avoid suspicion of Urido I got the guard to tell me the names of things that I would hold up or point at.

During the afternoon we heard nothing of Bremen, and I wondered, for I felt sure he would not let a chance go by to do us some mean thing for the way Urido had broken into his attack upon Pylanpin in the garden. Something was in store for us, but it was impossible to get a line on Bremen's next move.

We ate of the dry, boiled rice that was brought us. But we ate sparingly, for no water was brought with it or any other moist food to help the stuff down. Just rice was our portion.

Finally the sun settled below the horizon out beyond the sea and a cool breeze blew in over the bay. Urido and I sat in the doorway of our hut, feeling very miserable.

My back hurt cruelly. Each cut seemed to be doing its best to ache more than any of its fellows. Urido said he felt the same. But it was uncomfortable to talk, for our tongues stuck to our palates—they were dry and roughened.

The black outlines of the guard sitting cross-legged on the ground a few yards from us toward the beach had a dejected droop to it.

A fire flared in the center of the plaza. Small groups of natives came from the streets of the village and walked slowly through the open space. All were very quiet. There was none of the hilarious chaffing or sudden outburst of song, or harum-skarum romping of little children in the fresh air of the evening which would be expected of such people as these.

Everywhere was the oppressed atmosphere of people afraid. They did not know what mood Bremen might be in. I did not fully understand this until later, when I saw real cause for this dread of one man's despotic moods.

One group of husky men, black, muscular fellows, walked quietly toward the canoes drawn up on the beach and hovered over the boats. They were the pearl-divers.

They approached their boats as they would some fond friend who was sick. None of them made a move to launch a craft. After a short time spent wandering around and sort of caressing each his own canoe, they returned up the beach, walking with dejected step.

It all made me wonder; the unusual quiet, the downcast air of our guard and the pearl-divers and the lack of playing children. I wondered if these people were finding the pleasure in the new order of government that some of the younger bloods had anticipated when they assisted in overthrowing King Gig-Gig.

While I looked toward the people out by the fire Bremen became active in his hut. He yelled at his man Reiker to "get the hell out and let me dress!" And the tone made all of the villagers stop in their tracks, listen, then hurriedly start, each for home.

Then a regular fusillade of profanity came from Bremen's hut where the brute was undoubtedly dressing after his day's sleep in readiness to get out in the cool of the evening. These two were much more apt to be up and doing in the dark hours than in the light of day, like honest folks.

Urido and I turned our backs to the cool sea breeze to bring easement to our tortured flesh. We were sitting with our heads on our knees just trying to bear the shooting pains from our fevered sores without groaning.

We were both satisfied to be quiet, now that the flies were gone from us. We hoped that we wouldn't have to move.

And while I was listening to the jarring disturbance from Bremen's hut I thought I heard a little tap-tap-tap somewhere in the rear of our own hut.

"What's that?" Urido made effort to ask me.

"Some lizard after a roach," I answered with difficulty.

Again more distinctly came the tap-tap-tap. And it was so plainly no lizard's tail making that regular noise that I got up and went to see what it might be.

I stopped at the back wall, near where Urido had gone through in the afternoon. From right on the other side of the bamboo wall came tap-tap-tap.

It was some one knocking softly on our hut. I knelt on the floor and peered through a crack. Dimly, in the dark, I could make out a figure of some one standing outside.

"Who is it?"

I tried to say it in a whisper, but it was more of a croak. And for the moment I was fearful lest it might be Pug-ly-gug-lo come to see how we fared.

But as I thought of it the figure I had seen did not seem of big enough proportions to be that of the tall man.

"*Uglo,* Pylanpin!" a musical, feminine voice answered me in a low, cautious tone.

"*Uglo,* means open," Urido whispered in my ear, for he had joined me.

And I admit that it was with shaking fingers that I pushed aside the loose bamboos to open the rear of our hut and let Pylanpin in, for we had a message that I was eager to give her and she could tell us much.

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

According to Herbert Spencer

by

Achmed Abdullah

THE whole case, down to the very last international ramification, the end of which is not yet, hangs less by the enigma how the wicked, bluish six-gun happened to be in his pocket—an enigma which cannot be solved as Professor Lowell Cabot Day, as well as Brigadier-General Sir Hector M'Murtrie absolutely refuse to be quoted on the subject—than on the difference between Scotch and American logic, based on Spencerian formulas.

Negatively speaking, as to the six-gun, since the professor, as became a small, waspish, scholastic man, with dust-gray, bespectacled eyes, narrow shoulders, and large bumps of academic cognition, observed all laws, including that framed by Mr. Sullivan, he could not have had the revolver in his possession when he left New York and his Columbia chair of philosophy, six weeks earlier, on a trip to the African West Coast to find out there, among the primitive Gallas, if Herbert Spencer had been right in his dictum that civilization increases heterogeneity and that thus the white man departs more widely from the

mammalian archetype than does the savage. He couldn't have bought the weapon aboard the Woermann Liner, where only the regular ship souvenirs were for sale; nor in Kamerun itself, since the six-gun was in his hand and belching smoke half an hour after he landed.

Remains the interval of two days between his arrival in England and his departure for Kamerun; an interval during which a Serb fanatic fired the shot that, killing an archducal Hapsburg parasite, broke the dam of Germany's heinous dream of world conquest; an interval during which Lowell Cabot Day was closeted almost continuously with Brigadier-General Sir Hector M'Murtrie, who, besides his V.C., D.S.O., C.S.I., and military C.B., boasted such splendid academic and scientific initials as M.A., Ph.D., F.R.G.S., and F.Z.S., and who, having spent years between the stench of the Kongo, and the miasmatic slime of the Niger, gave him many valuable tips about Galla ethnology, so the professor said.

But it is worth while considering that the general's late wife had been the professor's sister, that the two were intimate friends, and that the Scotsman was an expert—some Liberal M. P.'s and newspaper editors said a fanatic—on certain points of foreign politics.

Also, he had visited Germany's West African colonies and agreed with the Germans, who say themselves that their countrymen, beneath the equatorial zodiac, suffer from what they call *Tropenkoller*—tropical madness—beginning with mildly comical megalomania, and usually winding up with brutal, crimson murder.

Thus, the enigma how the gun came into the professor's possession *might* possibly be explained after all.

And as to the rest, there is the slangy testimony of Subaltern St. George Leslie, of the Second Haussa Gunners.

II.

But that came later, and the professor was at peace with all the world as, twenty-five minutes after the slim, clipper-built Woermann Liner had snuggled into her dock, he was sitting on the veranda of the one and only Kamerun hotel styled grandiosely "Grosses Deutsches Afrika Haus Prinz Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen," dressed in neat but unsuitable pin-stripe worsted, drinking bottled, lukewarm seltzer-water, and dipping into the pocket-edition of Spencer's "Synthetic Philosophy," which was his *vade-mecum*.

"*Uniformity of law is a corollary from the persistence of force*," he read, when his reverie was interrupted by a tremendous, bovine Teutonic roar.

He turned, mildly curious, quite ignorant of the fact that his own particular destiny was about to open her screaming lungs of brass and blare at him; and among the people on the veranda—the usual driftwood of the African sea, the sort which European progress chucks to the limits of a duly grateful colored world, tucked into the same cargo with Bible, whisky, and disease—he saw an immense German officer, over six-foot in height, with a beak nose, a drooping Longobard mustache, a cleft chin like a motion-picture hero, and feet like an aurochs.

Lowell Cabot Day closed the book, carefully marking the passage. Though academic, book-bred, he considered it his duty to observe once in a while the living specimens and see how they fitted in with his theories. He had read about the persistence of force—and here was a breathing, roaring example. Force. Force incarnate, sprawling naked and unashamed. And he studied him, fascinated, just a little frightened, rather nervous of being observed by him.

The German was massively, resplendently drunk—and the alcohol, *plus* the tropics, *plus* the news from Europe that had come by cable a few hours earlier, had fanned his aggressive, grotesque Teuton patriotism into burning flame.

At a corner table a handful of Englishmen and Frenchmen, traders from the Kongo and the Bight of Benin who had come to Kamerun in search of bargains in orchilla-root and gum-copal, were peacefully sipping their rum-shrub. He swaggered up to them and, his right hand hitting the scabbard at his side with a steely, significant rattle, thundered out:

"Hey, there, all you foreigners—every

one of you! Stand up and drink with me—damn you—drink with me!"

A twitter of excitement passed through the crowd. The Englishmen looked stiff. The Frenchmen smiled self-consciously. The Germans—they were in the majority—jested and laughed. The plum-colored, white-jacketed Kroo waiters shivered and looked unhappy.

"And here's my toast," continued the officer, rudely snatching up a glass of rum-shrub from the table of the foreigners. "To hell with England, and France, and Belgium! For," he lowered his voice ludicrously, as if imparting a tremendous secret, "it is going to be war! War!" He hiccuped. "And you—you weak, old, effeminate nations—you're going to be swept into the dust heap! There's going to be room for only one nation hereafter—*Deutschland! Deutschland!* Stand up, you foreign swine—stand up and drink to Germany, and a German victory!" And again he touched his rattling saber while his countrymen laughed and applauded.

The Kongo traders looked at one another, uncertain what to do, but quite certain that the German officer, mad drunk with alcohol, the tropics, and the latent brutality in his soul, secure in the inviolability of the "king's coat" that fitted his broad chest without a wrinkle, the length of steel by his side, and the support of his countrymen, had them in a tight corner.

"Stand up, you swine—or—" came the thick, minatory growl; and they rose, one by one, seeking each other's eyes, trying to encourage each other, too, to excuse each other with gestures and whisperings:

"It's all right, old top. The rotter is spiffed."

"*Force majeure, mon p'tit!*"

"It's only meant in chaff, y'know."

"Infernal cad!"

"No use rowin' about the blessed thing, what?"

They lifted their glasses, about to drink to the shameful toast; and then, as he swayed, quite suddenly the German caught sight of the professor who was staring at him fixedly.

He turned.

"You, too, you little, undersized, damned prune of a Britisher! Stand up—you—" he bellowed, adding a flood of insults.

Lowell Cabot Day was meek, but logical.

"I am not an Englishman," he said in rather a thin voice. "I am—"

"Don't contradict me, you—*verdammter, rotznariger skleiner Mistfleck!*" came the thundering reply, and the German stepped up close to his new victim, plucked him from the chair as he might a child, and raised an immense, purple fist about to strike him.

The professor obeyed a perfectly natural instinct; he tried to sidestep the coming blow. But his foot caught in a torn grass-mat, precipitating him forward.

He reeled against the other. His hand went up automatically, clutching for support, for something solid to hold on to.

And, not knowing, never imagining what he was doing, he gripped the German's big peak of a nose firmly with his right, tweaking it with the despair of a body which feels itself falling.

The other jumped back with a howl of rage and pain. His sword flashed free from the scabbard. The point of it danced in the tropical sun like a cresset of evil passions.

"Oh, my God!" sighed somebody in the crowd, while again the professor's thin, waspish body did a rapid bit of sidestepping.

Again his foot caught. Again he reeled. Again he clutched for support. Found none. His right hip bumped smartly against the corner of an iron table. Instinctively he put his hand in his pocket, to rub the hurt place—and encountered the six-gun.

III.

LONG afterward, when speaking to chosen cronies of his mad African adventure, Professor Day would insist that the revolver burned his hand like red-hot metal, that he took it out, tried to throw it away.

But, whatever his intentions, suddenly the thing went off with a terrific explosion, heavy, curling, acrid smoke—then a yell and a flop—and there was the German officer before him on his knees, howling for mercy!

Of course, a moment later, the other Germans rushed up and closed in, with lifted hands and a hectic chorus of:

"The fellow's out of his head!"

"Tried to murder the co[illegible]!"

"Off with him to jail!"

But a lean, saturnine countenance detached itself from behind a month-old Detroit *News*, lengthened into six-foot of lanky, Middle-Western humanity, drawled that his countryman had acted in self-defense and that—by gosh—he was the American consul, as they knew, and if anybody wanted to monkey with the buzz-saw, he personally would have to be shown a whole lot, because his ancestral grandmother was a native of Pike County, Missouri!

Which seemed to be an argument, strangely convincing, that the others had heard before, must have submitted to before. For they picked up the fallen, shaken, hysterical colonel and left the hotel while the Kongo traders clustered about the professor and shook his hand and laughed and talked.

A new king, it appeared, a red-handed warrior and mighty chief had risen in Israel; and his name was Lowell Cabot Day, professor and esquire, of Boston and New York, U. S. A.!

They buzzed around him and praised his prowess and offered cigars and cigarettes and drinks. Even the Kroo waiters grinned at him. At first they fawned a little apprehensively, it is true. But then they saw that, unlike their German lords, this new fighting man from beyond the bitter waters carried neither saber nor length of pickled rhinoceros hide; and so they gave many thanks to the special jujus which protected their home kraals and rushed gaily in and out of the bar, with brimming glasses of various and mixed liquors.

The professor was all for returning to his Herbert Spencer and his seltzer-water. But the others would not hear of it.

"Just one little snifter, old top!"

Well—and then another, what?

And at the end of a giddy, kaleidoscopic afternoon, he saw the world through a veil that was a happy nuance of rose-madder, nicked with purple, and flecked with gold.

Peter Madison, the American consul, who had disappeared in the early stages of the impromptu festivities, returned around dinner-time, looking rather white and haggard, and led the professor away under the pretext of broiled steak, baked potatoes, ripe olives, and a few more such culinary specialties by which, as he claimed, he was trying to keep up his home traditions amid the tortured, stinking extravagances of the tropics.

"Professor," he said, turning from the hotel and toward the yellow beach that shimmered beneath an African sunset of dun and cinnamon and pale, uncut opal, "you have about two hours to get aboard. Lucky thing you haven't had time to unpack your trunks, what with revolver popping and lapping up liquor."

"I *beg* your pardon," replied Lowell Cabot Day in his most academic manner, made yet more stiltified by a more liberal libation than he had ever had since leaving Harvard. "Is my auricle at odds with my tympanum? Or are you really speaking about getting aboard—a ship, I presume?"

"You presume right," drawled the Middle Westerner. "See that low-lying, disreputable Norwegian coast bumboat out yonder—where she dips her jack against the dying sun? Well, you get aboard her just as quick as your little legs'll let you and talk turkey to the skipper. He's shipping on the night tide, and you are going to travel right along with him. I'll see after your trunks." And when the professor looked dumfounded, too, a little ashamed, quite positive that the unwonted alcohol was playing tricks with his hearing and understanding, he went on: "That guy you pulled your rough gun-play on was Colonel von Zitzewitz, and he's the K. O., the commanding officer of this sweating black-and-tan dump, see?"

"Yes, yes," said the professor. "But, my dear sir, even suppose for the sake of argument that I snapped the trigger of the lethal weapon on purpose, thus releasing the bullet and causing the officer to genuflect himself before me in an unseemly and undignified manner—why, I did so in self-defense. You said so yourself."

"Sure I did. And I'd stick to it through hell-fire and high water. In time of peace! Only—listen here—" he bent down from his

great height and whispered raucously into the other's large, floppy ear.

Lowell Cabot Day looked up startled.

"You—you are sure?" he asked. "War?"

"Sure's my front name's Pete! Got a little private code cable from London just about fifteen minutes ago while you were engaged with that souse party. Got it ahead of the Dutch. They'll know about it by to-night. And then—if you're still here—I can still protest and threaten and make the eagle scream. But what good 'll it do you after you are dead and popped into pine-boards, eh?"

"You think the colonel will—"

"I *know* he will! He's a bloodhound, with the accent on the blood. He'll declare martial law and frame you up and swing you from the nearest decorative bit of jungle scenery. Kick out o' here while the kickin's good, little man. Come on. We'll make a stab for that tramp boat."

But the professor shook his head very slowly, very decisively.

"My dear sir," he said, "I am afraid you do not quite comprehend my motives for having taken this extraordinary journey. I have come here to conduct certain philosophic—I might even say sociological —experiments with the aborigines, so as to be able either to confute or to confirm the theory advanced by Herbert Spencer that—"

"Stow it! Come along!" The consul took hold of his arm.

Again the professor shook his head. He was growing a trifle irritated as he might have back home, addressing a class-room that seemed particularly slow in comprehending a simple truth.

"Quite impossible," he said. "Of course I am grateful for the kindly interest you take in me. But I assure you that my studies, though consubstantiated as well as constringed by the principle of force, have nothing to do with the actualities of peace or of war."

"Your studies? Oh, my sainted grandaunt! How in Hades are you going to study—whatever you're going to study—when you're dead and your grave covered with fifty pounds of assorted rocks so that the jackals can't get at you? The ship—"

"The ship be—damned!" came Lowell Cabot Day's sudden, startlingly unacademic reply. "I am not going back. I am going ahead, into the hinterland, to study the Gallas, a[illegible] made up my mind to!" And he looked straight at the other out of his dust-gray, bespectacled eyes.

Madison stared back, into the eyes, beyond them, into the man's soul.

Then he gave a slow, crooked smile.

"You win," he said laconically; and, after a pause, chuckling: "Say, I just wonder if you're as all-fired innocuous as you try to make believe. For—perhaps you're right! Perhaps that skunk of a Zitzewitz is going to refuse clearance papers to the tramp ship the last moment. Perhaps the interior *is* the only place for you. Well, God bless you for a plucky little shrimp! Come right along. I'll fix you up with a horse and an impromptu outfit and quinin and a Congressional copy of the burial service, and I'll have a few first-class buck coons who'll travel along with you. Get a move on!"

And half an hour later, while night dropped over the Kameruns with a sodden mantle of sable and gold, while the German colonel was holding forth to his two majors, his six captains, and a baker's dozen of lieutenants what he was going to do to that Yankee "just as soon as the war-rumor was confirmed," Lowell Cabot Day was turning the corner of the consul's house atop a little Arab mare that was entirely covered by the large Frazer saddle the consul had brought out with him, while six picked West Coast negroes were trotting at his heels like dogs, their purple-black faces distorted in wide, toothy grins.

"*Ahee!*" said their leader, a six-foot Balolo from beyond the Yellala Falls, as he gave the bale on his head a resounding thwack with a palm cudgel in token of his strength and prowess. "Our new chief is fearless and brave. The great *umlino* of the Germans cowered before him like a dog. Like a dog, well beaten with thorn sticks! He is a cat in climbing, a deer in running, a snake in twisting, a hawk in pouncing, a jackal in scenting!"

"*N'dio! L'kini shauri yah!*" came the clicked chorus.

And early the next morning as, past a matted wilderness trail that was a sealed book to the Germans, they were camping in a clearing, with the professor sitting peacefully beneath a flowery carob-tree, his mind occupied with a philosophic theme which, had he been asked, he would have entitled simply as the mutual limitations of men's actions necessitated by their coexistence as units of society; while the rest of the porters, like happy African savages, were busying themselves with pots and pans and pipes, the Balolo went a few steps into the jungle and squatted on his hunkers.

From a mysterious hiding-place in his voluminous, flat head-dress, he drew forth a little drum covered with tightly stretched monkey-skin and began rubbing it scientifically.

Rub-rub-rub-rumbeddy-rub-rub-bannng! —the song of the drum droned up, in the Morse code of all Africa.

Rub-rumbeddy-rub! —sobbing into the hinterland with the tale of the new chief from across the bitter waters—the chief at whose feet the German *umlino* had cowered like a dog, well beaten with thorn sticks.

Rub-rub-bannng! — the farther drums took up the message and sent it on; while back in the port of Kamerun, a hectic German colonel was unsuccessfully trying to bully the American consul; while the cables from Europe to New York zummed with the incredible, intolerable news that the imperial Hohenzollern beast was running amuck; while sober, stern men of the free nations met in solemn conclave with their household gods falling about them in pieces; and while, in a certain Downing Street office Brigadier-General Sir Hector M'Murtrie, V.C., D.S.O., said to a black-mustached member of the Liberal Cabinet:

"Double-dash it all, sir! I told you so!"

To which the other replied:

"I know. But we must do the best we can. We must carry through. Now—about German Kamerun."

IV.

MEANWHILE, far from the beaten tracks where scattered German colonial troops were converging toward the coast to meet the expected shock of the British, the fetid hinterland was swallowing Professor Lowell Cabot Day.

A sort of path led through an impenetrable mass of bush and thorn and creepers covered with exaggerated, tortured tropical blossoms. A continuous, hot, moist wind came from beyond the frayed edge of the forest. The professor's mare had fallen and broken her neck, and so he trudged along on foot, suffering, yet uncomplaining.

For his mind was busy with sanely constructive, philosophic thoughts, and he observed steadily his Galla porters as well as the inhabitants of the occasional villages through which they passed; making copious notes for either the refutation or the proof of the Spencerian theory that species, under the influence or the absence of higher civilization, will not remain uniform.

Thus he was silent, the more so as he found it hard to understand pidgin-English of the Balolo who acted as guide, interpreter and chief adviser.

The bearers looked up to him with respect —the tale of the six-gun belching fire had not lost flavor in the frequent telling—and the respect heightened when one morning, while Lowell Cabot Day was still asleep, the Balolo gave the cook a severe beating with the courbash. No particular reason, he said, but "*Master's orders.*" Which was a lie.

And steadily the chant of the signal drums preceded the professor's progress.

North of Gashaka, skirting the British Niger Protectorate, the headman of a village who had heard of the new white chief's prowess—but who had heard not a word of that great conflict which was raging in Europe—came to camp to present greetings. He addressed him through the interpreter.

The latter translated:

"These, oh my master, are the words of M'pakala, the chief. '*I have placed my hand and my heart on the sill of the door of humility, the sill of the door of love, the sill of the door of respect. See! I bring thee my soul as an offering.*'"

The Balolo stopped. He looked at Lowell Cabot Day, waiting for ceremonious answer. But none came. For the professor was deep in the consideration of some

synthetic dogma. He was paying no attention to them.

So the Galla headman, bowing from the waist with a tinkle of barbarous ornaments, with hands outstretched in sign of supplication, slowly withdrew backward, crestfallen, humbled.

And again — *rub - derub - rumbeddy-bannng!*—the drums took up the tale of the new fighting man.

"*Beware of him,*" thumped the far drums across jungle and plain. "*Beware of him. He is a great chief, proud and fearless. He speaks not with us. He sits quiet, white, haughty, his lips compressed, his eyes studying a little book of magic. He says no word. Great is he indeed. His hand is heavy and pitiless. He is a wildcat devouring his own young!*"

Thus, daily, nightly, ran the message of the drums, clear back to a far bush station, on the British side of the border, where Subaltern St. George Leslie of the Second Haussa Gunners was cursing his luck and the orders from the war office which kept him from taking part in the big European mixup—until, one night, a Haussa sergeant, familiar with the drum code, picked up a tail end of the message that came thumping out of the southeast, from across Kamerun, and spoke of it to St. George Leslie.

The latter whistled through his teeth in a decidedly schoolboyish manner.

"My word!" he said. "A big fighting man, did you say, who's rallyin' to himself the up-country chiefs? What did you say is the rotter's name?"

"'*The wildcat which devours his own young!*'"

Again the subaltern whistled.

"Gory sobriquet, what? By Jingo, I lay you long odds the blighter's a Fritz, and the first thing we know he'll be tryin' to chevy some of his *schrecklichkeiten* into British territory!"

And he sent a code cablegram to London, winding up with:

"Sitting tight. Awaiting developments. Have only half company of Haussas, twelve down with Blackwater fever. Send support."

Support came, in the form of a quick-marching column, and it was led by the valiant Sir Hector M'Murtrie.

V.

For, in the mean time, while the British and French and Belgians were battling against the invader, England had not lost sight of the other fronts, and, in its leisurely, unbusinesslike fashion, was carrying on half a dozen fair-sized campaigns in as many unhealthy climates. There was Persia. There was Gallipoli and Suez. There was Samoa, German Southwest, and German East Africa.

Finally, there was Kamerun—and Sir Hector.

Thus Lascars sweated. Babu clerks wept. English skippers cursed. The commissary burned midnight oil and counted gray hairs. Transports coaled and filled. Transports sailed and landed.

Plans were completed; and, down the Niger Coast, from Lagos, past New Calabar, past Old Calabar, past the black-white-and-red frontier posts that jeer to sea, toward stately Fernando Po, they swept: horse, foot, and the guns; home-British, Haussas, bearded Rajputs, melancholy, hook-nosed Sikhs, ruffianly Afghans, squat, furtive Madrasis; throwing a fine-meshed, steely net across that part of the Hohenzollerns' imperial dreams and catching in it a mixed, black-and-white German division—including Colonel von Zitzewitz.

And one day, while at tiffin in the Grosses Deutsches Afrika Haus Prinz Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, which had been rechristened Hotel St. Andrew and Albion, Sir Hector was worrying over his brother-in-law, the professor, who according to the American consul had "disappeared like a plucky little shrimp in the general direction of sleeping sickness, tsetse flies, and death and had doubtless kicked the bucket by this time," a scarlet-turbaned Rajput orderly salaamed and brought a cable.

The general read it, left tiffin unfinished, startled his field officers by a string of rapid orders; and, at the head of his column, he connected with Subaltern St. George Leslie six weeks later—weeks fraught with great and wondrous happen-

ings, to believe the *rub-rubbedy-rub* of the gossiping African drums.

It appeared, in the words of the subaltern, that "this particular Fritz up the hinterland ain't the sort who believes in—what's the blighter's name—you know—superman, and bally buckets of blood, and mailed fists, and the blond beast, and all that variety of asinine piffle—"

"Nietzsche?" suggested Sir Hector M'Murtrie.

"Right-o, skipper! That chap up the interior, in spite of his name—"

"What's his name?"

"I don't know. I mean what the blacks call him—'*the wildcat which devours his own young*'—rather gory, what? But, in spite of it, according to the drum messages, he rules by a sort of peaceful, glorified rule-of-three, five-plied and brought on a modern business basis."

"One of those constructive, efficient Germans, eh?"

"I fancy so, skipper. And they're the most dangerous of all the square-head species. He's only been up there about three months, but the chiefs flock to him, even from our side of the line, and jolly well squat at his heels and do what he tells 'em. He has stopped tribal war and started an entirely new system of government."

"How does he do it?" asked Sir Hector.

"Blessed if I know, sir. But the other day we caught a Kamerun Galla and put him through his paces, and he says that '*the wildcat which devours his own young*' is protected by a brand-new and very powerful juju idol, named Ha-Ba Span-Sah—"

"Ha-Ba Span-Sah?" The general shook his head. "Doesn't sound like Galla to me. Something fishy about it. Well, Leslie, I think we'd better pay the wildcat a call—in style!"

Thus marching orders; and the British column moved southeast, like a khaki-colored snake with innumerable bobbing heads. Through Adamwa they pushed, straight into the Kamerun panhandle, in the direction of yellow Wadai, throwing ahead of their advance a fan-shaped deployment of mounted scouts to guard against jungle ambush. But there was no fighting, no sniping, no poisoned arrows shot by unseen hands.

Up there in the Kamerun hinterland there was not even the echo of war, and the farther they proceeded the more they heard about the new white chief, the peace he had brought, his wonderful system of government, and his magic and powerful juju called Ha-Ba Span-Sah—the sobbing night drums talked of nothing else.

Then, early one morning, as they reached the southeast corner of Lake Tchad, the drums thumped word that the kraal of the great white chief was near.

Redoubling their precautions, they trekked on. But, as before, there was never a sign of resistance nor ambush. As before, the Gallas whom they encountered were harmless traders and bearers and drovers.

No—they would say when quizzed by the British intelligence officers—there was no strife. Such were the orders of "*the wildcat which devours his own young,*" and his great juju Ha-Ba Span-Sah—

To the north Lake Tchad offered its steaming, sapphire surface to the fiery kiss of the sun. There stretched miles of pebbly, orange beach with an occasional fantastic bush—like a Japanese water color—silhouetting the far verge above the surf and league-long spits of sand whence slender, tufted jets of palms etched the vacant azure spaces.

Northwest they turned. Then, after a sharp descent into a valley green with durra and millet and Galla-corn, beyond a sudden grove of banyan trees—old, hoary, knobbed with age and contorted by the winds of the centuries into gnarled bulks that lifted from the ground in triumphant balls of black foliage splotched with scarlet—the kraal of the great white chief burst into view like a flower; and as the advance party of the British, led by Sir Hector M'Murtrie and with Subaltern Leslie as aide-de-camp, jingled past rows of tents and grass huts, with the blacks clicking friendly salutations, past tethered camels and shaggy ponies straining at their heel ropes, they came face to face with the great white chief himself.

He was sitting beneath a flowering cinnamon tree, dressed in well-worn, shiny,

and very unsuitable pin-stripe worsted, and dipping his eager, scholastic nose into a leather-bound book.

He looked up as he heard the martial approach, put down the book, and wiped his spectacles.

"Well, well, well," he said; and Sir Hector broke into a loud guffaw.

He turned to his subaltern.

"Leslie," he said, "I want you to meet my brother-in-law, Professor Lowell Cabot Day—also known as '*the wildcat which devours his own young*'"; and, while the younger officer was spluttering, he addressed the other:

"I say, Lowell, what's all this I hear about a brand-new juju idol that's s'posed to be your side-kick? Ha-Ba Span-Sah, the drums call it."

The professor shook his head rather wearily.

"It is most discouraging, most discouraging," he said. "I took endless trouble in acquiring the local dialect. I succeeded, too. I endeavored to the best of my ability to explain to them that civilization is a thing of systematic growth, at times influenced by phenomena of super-organic derivation; very much—I was careful to choose an example, a simile which their minds might grasp—very much like the fact of a bar of steel, suspended in the magnetic meridian and repeatedly struck, becomes magnetized, the magnetization being the result of the rearrangement of particles produced by the magnetic force of the earth when vibrations are propagated through them—"

"I beg your pardon, sir," broke in St. George Leslie, choking with suppressed mirth, "did you tell 'em that in—in the Galla language?"

"I did, sir," replied Lowell Cabot Day. "And I found it extremely difficult. The Galla language, being mostly a mixture of primitive clicks expressing primitive thoughts, is not exactly pliable."

"Right as rain," dryly said Sir Hector. "Go on!"

"Well, they did not understand me—at least not the philosophy, the synthetic and very sound philosophy of my theories of government. But, somehow, they approved of the government itself—a government based on the dogmas of Herbert Spencer.

"You see," he added, just a little sheepishly, "that is what they mean by my juju, my fetish. Ha-Ba Span-Sah—they pronounce it that way, and they think that this pocket-companion of mine"—gently touching the leather-bound edition of "Synthetic Philosophy"—"is the juju idol which protects me.

"My dear Hector, I am afraid they pray to it, and at times try to placate it by certain blood sacrifices of graminivorous and frugivorous animals of which I, being after all a Christian, disapprove most heartily. Still," he wound up, with conscious pride and pointing at the peaceful sweep of huts, "I believe that the result—"

"Rather!" Sir Hector concurred heartily, "the result is splendid. The British government will express its thanks to you in an appropriate manner."

And then came a thunderbolt.

"The British government?" asked Lowell Cabot Day, raising his eyebrows. "My dear Hector, what has the British government to do with this—*my* country—ah—my—Spencerian commonwealth?"

"You mean to say—" Sir Hector was aghast.

"Exactly!" And the professor told the other the whole of his African adventure, beginning with the revolver bullet which caused Colonel von Zitzewitz to go down on his knees, and winding up with:

"I have annexed this country!"

"But! Lowell! Germany and Great Britain are at war!"

"What is that to me?" demanded the professor, belligerently. "Of course I am pro-British and anti-German. But—I am neither British *nor* German. I am an American."

"Quite so!" exclaimed his brother-in-law. "You are an American, and America is neutral—though I hope to God it won't remain neutral long. But, in the mean time, you cannot annex German territory on your own hook, my dear boy. For America and Germany are at peace. You are breaking the law of nations!"

The professor looked up, a light in his dust-gray eyes.

" Hector," he said in his precise Harvard accent, " I have always been lawless—at heart!"

And, when Sir Hector snorted and choked, he continued:

" I am the founder, organizer, and temporary dictator of this commonwealth."

" But! Good Lord! Lowell! Lowell Cabot Day!"

" Of course," the professor went on, unheeding the interruption, " if America should join in the war, I, as a loyal American, shall turn this commonwealth over to the protection of the Stars and Stripes. Then your government and mine can make whatever arrangements, disposals—or "—he winked—" bargains, as they think proper. But until such time I shall hold this land in—ah—I believe that ' personal fief ' is the correct historical term."

Came a long, tense pause, during which the two brothers-in-law looked at each other as Greek is said to look at Greek, during which, furthermore, Sir Hector, though firmly entrenched in his own decision, felt the other's calm, didactic, academic determination hack at his own like a dagger.

Finally a thought came to him; an idea how to beat Lowell Cabot Day with his own, favorite weapon: the weapon of philosophic reasoning.

So he asked a gentle question:

" I say. You are a Spencerian scholar. Therefore you believe in logic, don't you?"

" Logic is next to godliness. According to Herbert Spencer it is a persistent attempt to frame natural perceptions into—"

" That 'll do, old chap," cut in the Scotsman. " You believe in logic. That's all I want to know. Then tell me. That six-gun—you must admit—"

Just then he noticed St. George Leslie's eyes resting upon him with eager curiosity, and so he checked himself in the midst of his sentence and led his brother-in-law away.

" Yes. That six-gun—" came the latter's modulated voice, drifting through the shimmering, dancing heat—

That six-gun!

The root, mysterious, cabalistic, occult, which had precipitated the whole trouble, including the very last international ramification the end of which is not yet!

VI.

" As to that six-gun," drawled Subaltern St. George Leslie, weeks later, to a young captain of the Buffs, as he was recuperating from an attack of Blackwater fever in the red-plush, cigarette-flavored coziness of the Junior Army and Navy Club that overlooks the Strand, " I never heard the whole bally tale. Just bits here and there —and the whole mixed up with scraps from Herbert Spencer and appeals to philosophic reason and logic.

" Y' see, dear boy, those two old joshers, Sir Hector and the Yankee professor, were chinnin' about it all the time, fightin' like two sanguinary first-term Eton oppidans over a pot of treacle, what? That first day at tiffin, f'instance, suddenly Sir Hector turns a jolly old, passionate magenta and pops out with:

" ' Dash it all, Lowell! Consider the logic of it! If it hadn't been for that revolver, you wouldn't have had to chevy out of Kamerun port like a calabus monkey with a land-crab clawing at his furry extremities!'

" ' I would, too!" pipes the Yankee. ' I always intended to go into the hinterland! That's why I made the trip to the West Coast!'

" ' Granted!' admits the skipper. ' But without the gun you wouldn't have accumulated that gory reputation through which you bamboozled the Galla chiefs and embezzled this—oh—Spencerian commonwealth!'

" And then the professor mumbles something about the instability of hypothetical potentialities, reenforcing it with some lengthy quotations, and saying that while the gun might have helped him, again it might not.

" Another time the skipper jaws something Scotch and choleric and guttural about, whatever *might* have happened if the other josher *hadn't* had the six-gun, the fact remained that he *had* had it; that thus it was the original basis for the foundation of the commonwealth. Therefore, since

both believed in the blessings of Spencer and sacred logic, how, in the name of half a dozen unmentionable things, could the professor deny that he, Sir Hector, having given the original impetus, the original cause, had all the jolly old right in the world to claim the ultimate result? Namely—the Spencerian commonwealth!

"'Right-o'—or something like it—replies the professor. 'You slipped that gun among my things when I wasn't looking, after I told you that I was a man of peace and wanted nothing to do with your international complications.'

"'There's gratitude for you!' the skipper sings out. 'I warned you how the tropics affect the Germans. I told you that war was just about due, and that it wouldn't improve the temper of these Colonial Prussions a dashed bit! I slipped that gun among your clothes to save your life, and—by Jupiter!—I *did* save it! Why, you ungrateful little pilchard—'

"'Abuse and argument are not synonyms!' cuts in Lowell Cabot Day with a sarcastic twang, and he goes on to say, proving it, too, with several lengthy quotations, that gratitude and logic aren't synonyms either; that the personal equation hadn't a thing to do with matters of philosophic reason and synthetic evolution and all that variety of piffle.

"'I did not ask you to slip the gun into my bag,' he says. 'You did it unbeknown to me! Even against my will! By this very act you gave up, in advance, whatever benefit might accrue to me through possession of the lethal weapon! *Consensus facit legem*'—or some other such Latin poppycock he drawls out, and then he makes the whole thing shipshape with another long-winded quotation that leaves Sir Hector speechless and raging.

"And so every day and every day. And when I go down with Blackwater fever—by this time the professor had run up an impromptu American flag on the cinnamon tree beneath which he jawed with his Galla chiefs, and Sir Hector the Union Jack on a toddy palm the other side of the kraal—the two were still jabberin' about six-gun and reason and basic claims and logic and Herbert Spencer—"

Subaltern St. George Leslie stopped to take a sip of his brandy peg, while the captain of the Buffs looked up with bored, steel-blue eyes.

"I say, old chap," he asked. "Who the dooce *is* that Herbert Spencer person?"

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FOR YOU

BY DIXIE WILLSON

DEAR
Say, do you hear—
My heart?

Do you know why it's so busy
With its pounding?
Oh, I'm dizzy
With the joy of what's within it!
Why, I hardly dare to whisper
What I know is growing in it!
It's too wondrous to be true!
It is a daring thing to do—
But a carpenter named Cupid
Is at work with all his tackle—
Is at work on building in my heart—
A little home for you!

From Now On

by Frank L. Packard

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

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

DAVE HENDERSON, warped by circumstances and environment rather than by a vicious inheritance, clerk and handy man for Booky Skarvan (a crooked racetrack bookmaker and general wastrel), had been deputed to take his master's car into San Francisco, secure a hundred thousand dollars which Skarvan's millionaire friend and true sport, honest Martin Tydeman, had promised to loan him, to make good his losses on the track that day, and return by the nine o'clock night train to the track.

Henderson determined to secure the money for himself, and then make a fresh start in new surroundings. He successfully entered Tydeman's house, secured the money, and was returning to his own room, after concealing the prize in an abandoned dovecote in the rear of his landlady's premises, when he heard Runty Mott, a racecourse tout, and Baldy Vickers, professional gangster, waiting in his room and discussing with one another Booky Skarvan's instructions how they were to take the money and dispose of Henderson.

Dave escaped in his car, pursued by Mott and his gang, and finally made a temporary getaway by wrecking the pursuing car as it dashed around a bend.

Later, sick with fever and a wound in the leg, he had been taken from a box-car by Lieutenant Joe Barjan, of the Frisco plain-clothes squad, and sentenced to five years in the penitentiary.

Here he had met Charles Millman, a victim of circumstances, honest gentleman from New York, who for two years had tutored Dave in the way of an education and a higher moral standard.

Just sixty-three days remained of the long five years of living misery when Barjan appeared upon the scene, and, by promises first and then by threats, sought to learn from Henderson the hiding-place of the money.

Henderson listened with mounting impatience to the detective's plea, and then curtly bade him "go to hell!"

BOOK II — *Continued*

CHAPTER II.

WOLVES ON THE SCENT.

GUARDS on the raised platforms at either end of the room, guards circulating among the striped figures that toiled over the work benches, guards watching everywhere. They aroused a new and sullen fury in Dave Henderson's soul. They seemed to express and exemplify today in a sort of hideous clearness what Barjan had told him last night that he might expect in all the days to follow.

His number was up on the board!

He had not slept well last night. Barjan did not know it, but Barjan had struck a blow that had, in a mental way, sent him groggy to the ropes. He was groggy yet. His mind was in confusion. He seemed to have lost his equilibrium and his poise.

Never had he expected that the whole world would turn its back while he walked from the penitentiary to Mrs. Tooler's pigeon-cote and tucked that package of a hundred thousand dollars under his arm. In that sense Barjan had told him nothing new. But nevertheless Barjan had struck home. He could not tell just where in the conversation, at just precisely what point, Barjan had done this, nor could he tell in any concrete way just what new difficulties and obstacles Barjan had reared up.

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

He had always expected that it was up to him to outwit the police when he got away from these cursed guards. But his mind was laggard this afternoon. He had lashed it, driven it too hard through the night and through the morning. It had lost tenacity: it would not define.

The only thing that held and clung there, and would not be dislodged, was the unreal, a snatch of nightmare out of the little sleep, fitful and troubled, that he had had. He was swimming across a dark, wide pool whose banks were all steep and impassible except at one spot which was very narrow, and here a figure worked feverishly with a pile of huge stones, building up a wall against him. He swam frantically, like a madman; but for every stroke he took, the figure added another stone to the wall; and when he reached the edge of the bank the wall was massive and high, and Barjan was perched on the top of the wall grinning at him.

He raised his hand, and drew it across his eyes. The clatter and clamor in the carpenter-shop here was unendurable. The thud of a hammer jarred upon him, jangling his nerves; the screech of the band-saw, a little way down the shop, was like the insane raving of some devil, with a devil's perverted sense of humor, running up and down a devil's scale. There were sixty-two days left.

His eyes fell upon old Tony Lomazzi a few benches away. Showing under Tony's cap, the hair, what there was of it, was silver—more nearly silver than it had somehow ever seemed to be before. Perhaps the prison barber had been a little late in getting around to the old man this time, perhaps it was because it was a little longer. It was strange though, rather queer! His eyes, arrested now, held on the other, and he seemed to be noticing little details that had never attracted his attention before. His own hands, that mechanically retained their grip upon the plane he had been using, were idle now.

Certainly those old shoulders over there were more bowed and bent than he had ever seen them before. And the striped form was very frail; the clothes hung on it as clothes hang on a scarecrow. There was only the old fellow's side face in view, for the other's back was partially turned, but it appeared to possess quite a new and startling unfamiliarity. It wasn't the gray-white, unhealthy pallor—old Tony wasn't the only one who had that—no one had ever claimed that there was any analogy between a penitentiary and a health resort — but the jowl was most curiously gaunt, and drawn inward as though the man were sucking in his cheeks, and yet the skin seemed to stretch tight and hard as a drum-head.

Very curious! It must be because he couldn't see the sharp little black eyes, full of fire, that put life and soul into that scarecrow frame.

Old Tony turned, and their eyes met. The old man lifted his hand as though to wipe his mouth—and there was a little flirt of the fingers in Dave Henderson's direction. It was the old, intimate, little signal that had passed between them unnumbered times in the thousand years that they had spent together here in the penitentiary's carpentry shop—but he had been quite wrong about the eyes. Something seemed to have filmed across them, veiling their luster.

And suddenly Dave Henderson swallowed hard. Sixty-two days! Old Tony hadn't much more than that. Perhaps another year at the outside, and the old lifer would be free too.

Dave Henderson's mind reverted to Lieutenant Joe Barjan, of the plain-clothes squad. It was perfectly true that playing a lone hand against the police of all America was a desperate game—desperate in the sense that success was in jeopardy. That was what made his brain confused and chaotic now. He was afraid—not of Barjan, not of all the police in the United States in a physical way, he had never hedged a bet, and the five years that he had now paid would goad him on more than ever to face any physical risk, take any physical chance—but he was afraid now, sick with fear, because his mind would not respond and show him clearly, definitely the way to knock Barjan and his triumphant grin from off that nightmare wall, and—

A guard's voice snapped sharply at his elbow.

Yes, of course! He had been standing idle for a few seconds—perhaps an hour. Automatically he bent over the bench, and automatically his plane drew a neat, clean shaving from the work in front of him.

The guard's voice snapped again.

"You're wanted!" said the guard curtly. "There's a visitor to see you."

Dave Henderson turned away from the bench, and followed the guard—but the act was purely mechanical, born out of the years of discipline and obedience. A visitor—for him! There was no one in the outside world, not a soul, who cared for him, not many, even, to whom his existence was of enough interest to cause a second thought—except Barjan. And Barjan had visited him yesterday. Another visitor—to-day! Well, whoever it was, the visitor had been in no hurry about it! The little attention was certainly belated! His lips thinned bitterly. Whoever it was had waited almost five years.

He had never had a visitor before—except the police. It was an event! The bitterness grew deeper, and rankled. He had asked for no human touch, or thought, or consideration; he had asked for none, and he had given none; he had made his own bed, and he had not whined because it had proved to be a rack of torture. He was not whining now, and he had no desire to change the rules of the game that he himself had elected to play.

This was no visitor—it was an intruder!

But curiosity, as he crossed the prison yard and entered the main building, tempered the sullen antagonism that had flared up in his soul. Who was it that was waiting for him there along the corridor in the wire-netted visitor's room, where, like some beast with its keeper pacing up and down in front of the cage, he was to be placed on exhibition? He searched his brain for an answer that would be even plausible.

Not Square John Kelly. Kelly *might* have come if Kelly had been left to himself, but Kelly was the one man he had warned off from the beginning—there was that matter of three thousand dollars, and caution had prompted him to avoid any sign of intimacy between them. There was no one else. Even Kelly, perhaps, wasn't a friend any more. Kelly would, perhaps, simply play square, turn over the three thousand dollars—and then turn his back.

It wouldn't be Tooler. The only thing that interested Tooler was to see that he collected his room rent regularly—and there would be some one else paying rent now for that front room of Tooler's! No, there was no one else. Leaving a very keen regard for old Tony Lomazzi aside, he had only one friend that he knew of whom he could really call a friend, only one man that he could trust—and that man was a convict too!

It was ironical, wasn't it?—to trust a convict! Well, he could trust Millman—only it wouldn't be fair to Millman.

He lagged a little behind the guard as they approached the visitor's room, a sudden possibility dawning upon him. Perhaps it *was* Millman! Millman's time was up to-morrow, and to-morrow Millman was going away. He and Millman had arranged to say good-by to one another at the library hour to-day after work was over; but perhaps, as a sort of special dispensation, Millman had obtained permission to come here.

Dave Henderson shrugged his shoulders, impatient with himself, as the guard opened a door and motioned him to enter. It was absurd, ridiculous! Who had ever heard of one prisoner visiting another in this fashion! There wouldn't have been any satisfaction in it anyhow, with a guard pacing up and down between them! Well then, who was it?

The door closed behind him—he was subconsciously aware that the door had closed, and that the guard had left him to himself. He was also subconsciously aware that his hands had reached out in front of him and that his fingers were fiercely laced in the interstices of the heavy steel-wire netting of the enclosure in which he stood, and that faced another row of steel-wire netting, separated from his own only by the space that was required to permit the guard to pace up and down between the two—only the guard hadn't come in yet from the corridor to take up his station there.

There was only a face peering at him from behind that other row of netting—a fat face. The face was supposed to be smiling, but it was like the hideous grin of a gargoyle. It was the same face, the same face with its rolls of fat propped up on its short, stumpy neck. There wasn't any change in it, except that the red-rimmed gray eyes were more shifty. That was the only change in five years—the eyes were more shifty.

He found that his mouth was dry, curiously dry. The blood wasn't running through his veins, because his fingers on the wire felt cold—and yet he was burning, the soul of him suddenly like some flaming furnace, and a mad, passionate fury had him in its grip, and a lust was upon him to reach that stumpy neck where the throat was, and—and— He had been waiting *five* years for that—and he was simply smiling, just as that other face was smiling. Why shouldn't he smile!

That fat face was Booky Skarvan's face.

"I guess you weren't looking to see me, Dave?" said Skarvan, nodding his head in a sort of absurd cordiality. "Maybe you thought I was sore on you, and there's no use saying I wasn't. That was a nasty crack you handed me. If Tydeman hadn't come across with another bunch of coin on the jump, those pikers down at the track would have pulled me to pieces. But I didn't feel sore long, Dave—that ain't in me. And that ain't why I kept away."

The man was quite safe, of course, on account of these wire gratings, and on account of the guard who was somewhere out there in the corridor. It was very peculiar that the guard was not pacing up and down even now in this little open space between Booky Skarvan and himself — very peculiar!

He wanted to laugh out in a sort of maniacal hysteria, only he would be a fool to do that because there were sixty-two days left before he could get his fingers around that greasy, fat throat, and he must not *scare* the man off now. He had a debt to pay—five years of prison, those days and nights and hours of torment when he had been a wounded thing hounded almost to his death. Certainly, he owed all that to this man here! The man had cunningly planned to have him disappear by the *murder* route, hadn't he? And he owed Booky Skarvan for that too! If it hadn't been for that he would have got away with the money, and there wouldn't have been five years of prison, or those hours of physical torment, or— He lifted his hand and brushed it heavily across his forehead.

He was quite cool now, perfectly in control of himself. The man didn't have even a suspicion that he, Dave Henderson, knew these things. He mustn't put the other on his guard—there were still sixty-two days during which these prison walls held him impotent, and during which another, warned, could get very far out of reach. Yes, he was quite cool now. He was even still smiling, wasn't he? He could even play the man like a hooked fish. It wasn't time to land the other yet.

But it was strange that Booky Skarvan should have come here at all. Booky wasn't a fool, he hadn't come here for nothing. What was it the man wanted?

"Ain't you glad to see me, Dave?" demanded Booky Skarvan quite jocularly. "'Cause, if you ain't now, you will be before I go."

"What do you mean?" inquired Dave Henderson coolly.

"Notice anything queer about what's doing here right at this minute?" Booky left eye closed in a significant wink. "Sure, you do! There ain't any guard butting in, Dave. Get me? Well, I fixed it like that."

Dave Henderson relapsed into the old vernacular.

"Spill it!" he invited. "I'm listening."

"Attaboy!" Booky grinned. "You bet, you're listening! We ain't forgotten those years you and me spent together, have we, Dave? You know me, and I know you. I kept away from here until now, 'cause I didn't want 'em to get the right dope on the betting—didn't want 'em to think there was any chance of us playing up to each other."

"You mean you didn't want them to get wise that you were a crook, too," suggested Dave Henderson imperturbably.

Booky Skarvan had no false modesty—his left eyelid drooped for the second time.

"You got the idea, Dave," he grinned again. "They've got to figure I'm straight—that's the play. That's the play I've been making in waiting five years—so's they'd be sure there wasn't nothing between us.

"Now you listen hard, Dave. All you've handed the police is a frozen face, and that's the right stuff; but I got a dead straight tip they're going to keep their eyes on you till hell's a skating pond. They're going to get that money—*or else you ain't!* See?

"Well, that's where I stepped in.

"I goes to the right source, and I says: 'Look here, you can't do nothing with Dave. Let me have a try. Maybe I can handle him. He worked for me a good many years, and I know him better than his mother would, if he had one. He's stubborn, stubborn as hell, and threats ain't any good, nor promises neither; but he's a good boy, for all that. You let me have a chance to talk to him privately, and maybe I can make him come across and cough up that money. Anyway, it won't do any harm to try. I always liked Dave, and I don't want to see him dodging the police all his life. Tydeman's dead, and, though it was really Tydeman's money, I was a partner of Tydeman's, and if anybody on earth can get under Dave's shell I can.'"

Booky put his face closer to his own particular stretch of wire netting. He lowered his voice. "That's the reason I'm here, and that's the reason the guard—ain't!"

There was almost awe and admiration in Dave Henderson's voice.

"You've got your nerve with you!" he said softly.

Booky Skarvan smiled in a pleased way.

"Sure!" he said complacently. "And that's why we win. You get the lay, don't you?" He was whispering now. "You can't get that cash *alone*, Dave. I'm telling you straight they won't let you. But they won't watch *me!* You know me, Dave. I'll make it a fair split—fifty-fifty. Tell me where the money is, and I'll get it, and be waiting for you anywhere you say when you come out; and I'll fix it to hand over your share so's they'll never know you got it—I got to make sure it's fixed like that for my own sake, you can see that. Get me, Dave? And I go out of here now and tell the warden it ain't any good, that I can't get you to talk. I guess that looks nifty enough, don't it, Dave?"

There was a fly climbing up the wire netting. It zigzagged its course over the little squares. It was a good gamble whether, on reaching the next strand, it would turn to the right, or left, or continue straight ahead. Dave Henderson watched it. The creature did no one of those things. It paused and frictioned its front legs together in a leisurely fashion. After that, it appeared to be quite satisfied with its position—and it stayed there.

"Poor Booky!" murmured Dave Henderson. "Sad, too! I guess it must be softening of the brain!"

Booky Skarvan's face blotched suddenly red—but he pressed his face still more earnestly against the wire barrier.

"You don't get it!" he breathed hoarsely. "I'm giving you a straight tip. Barjan's waiting for you—the police are waiting for you. You haven't got a hope. I tell you, you can't get that money alone, no matter where you put it."

"I heard you," said Dave Henderson.

There was silence for a moment.

A sort of anxious exasperation spread over Skarvan's face, then perplexity, and then a flare of rage.

"You're a fool!" he snarled. "You won't believe me! You think I'm trying to work you for half of that money. Well, so I am, in a way—or I wouldn't have come here. But I'm earning it. Look at the risk I'm taking—five years, the same as you got. You crazy fool! Do you think I'm bluffing? I tell you again, I know what I'm talking about. The police 'll never give you a look-in. You got to have help. Who else is there but me? It's better to split with me than lose the whole of it, ain't it?"

"You haven't changed a bit in five years, Booky." There was studied insolence in Dave Henderson's voice now. "Not a damned bit! Run along now—beat it!"

"You mean that?" Booky Skarvan's eyes were puckered into slits now. "You mean you're going to turn me down?"

"Yes!" said Dave Henderson.

"I'll give you one more chance," whispered Skarvan.

"*No!*"

Booky Skarvan's fat fingers squirmed around inside his collar as though it choked him.

"All right!" His lips were twitching angrily. "All right!" he repeated ominously. "Then, by God, you'll never get the money—even if you beat the police! Understand? I'll see to that! I made you a fair, straight offer. You'll find now that there'll be some one else besides you and Barjan out for that coin—and when the showdown comes it won't be either you or Barjan that gets it! And maybe you think that's a bluff, too!"

"I never said I knew where the money was," said Dave Henderson—and smiled—and shrugged his shoulders. "Therefore you ought to stand just as good a chance as Barjan—or I. After I got wounded I kind of lost track of things, you know."

"You lie!" said Skarvan fiercely. "I—I—" He checked himself, biting at his lips. "I'll give you one more chance again. What's your last word?"

"You've got it, Booky," said Dave Henderson evenly.

"Then take mine!" Skarvan rasped. "I'll go now and tell the warden you wouldn't say anything. If you try to put a crimp in me by reporting my offer, I'll say you lied. I don't mind taking chances on my word being believed against the word of a convict and a thief who is known to be playing tricky! You get that? And after that—God help you!"

The man was gone.

Presently, Dave Henderson found himself back in the carpenter shop. The bandsaw was shrieking, screeching insanely again. He had smiled in there in the visitor's room at Booky Skarvan; he had even been débonair and facetious — he wasn't that way now. He could mask his face from others; he couldn't mask his soul from himself. It seemed as though his courage were being drained away from him, and in its place were coming a sense of final, crushing defeat.

Barjan's blow of last night had sent him groggy to the ropes; but the blow Booky Skarvan had just dealt had smashed in under his guard and had landed on an even more vital spot. Skarvan's veiled threat hadn't veiled anything. The veil was only too transparent! "God help you!" meant a lot. It meant that, far more dangerous to face, even more difficult to outwit than the police, there was now to be aligned against him the criminal element of San Francisco.

It meant Baldy Vickers and Runty Mott, and Baldy Vickers's gang. It meant the men who had already attempted to murder him, and who would be eager enough to repeat that attempt for the same stake—one hundred thousand dollars.

With the police it would have been, more than anything else, the simple thrust and parry of wits; now, added to that, was a physical, brutish force whose danger only a fool would strive to minimize. There were dives and dens in the underworld there, as he knew well enough, where a man would disappear from the light of day forever, and where tortures that would put the devil's ingenuity to shame could be applied to make a man open his lips. He was not exaggerating! It was literally true. And if he were once trapped he could expect no less than that. They had already tried to murder him once!

Naturally, they had entered into his calculations before, while he had been here in prison; but they had not seemed to be a very vital factor. He had never figured on Booky Skarvan setting that machinery in motion again—he had only figured on getting his own hands on Booky Skarvan himself. But he saw it now—and he realized that, once started again, they would stop at nothing to get that money. Whether Booky Skarvan would have abided by his offer, on the basis that he would get more out of it for himself that way, or whether it was simply a play to discover the whereabouts of the money and then divide up with his old accomplices, did not matter; it was certain now that Booky Skarvan would be content with less rather than with none, and that the underworld would be unleashed on his trail.

The police—and now the underworld!

It was like a pack of wolves and a pack of hounds in chase from converging directions after the same quarry; the wolves and the hounds might clash together, and fall upon one another — but the quarry would be mangled and crushed in the mêlée.

The afternoon wore on. At times Dave Henderson's hands clenched over his tools until it seemed the tendons must snap and break with the strain; at times the sweat of agony oozed out in drops upon his forehead.

Booky Skarvan was right. He could not get that money *alone*. No! No, that was wrong! He could get it alone, and he would get it, and then fight for it, and go under for it, all hell would not hold him back from that, and Booky Skarvan and some of the others would go under too — but he could not get *away* with the money alone.

And that meant that these five years of prison, five years of degradation, of memories that nauseated him, five years that he had wagered out of his life, had gone for nothing! God, if he could only turn to some one for help! But there was no one, not a soul on earth, not a friend in the world who could aid him — except Millman.

And he *couldn't* ask Millman — because it wouldn't be fair to Millman.

His face must have grown haggard, perhaps he was acting strangely. Old Tony over there had been casting anxious glances in his direction. He took a grip upon himself, and smiled at the old bomb-thrower. The old Italian looked pretty bad himself — that pasty whiteness about the old fellow's face had a nasty appearance.

His mind went back to Millman, working in queer, disconnected snatches of thought. He was going to lose Millman, too. Millman was going out to-morrow. It had always been a relief to talk to Millman. He had never told Millman where the money was, of course, but Millman knew what he was "in" for. The library hour wasn't far off, and it would help to talk to Millman now. Only Millman was going out to-morrow — and he was to bid Millman good-by.

This seemed somehow the crowning jeer of mockery that fate was flinging at him — that to-morrow even Millman would be gone. It seemed to bring a snarl into his soul, the snarl as of some gaunt, starving beast at bay, the snarl of desperation flung out in bitter, reckless defiance.

He put his hands to his face, and beneath them his jaws clamped and locked. They would never beat him, he would go under first, but — but —

Time passed. The routine of the prison life went on like the turning of some great, ponderous wheel that moved very slowly, but at the same time with a sort of smooth, oiled immutability. It seemed that way to Dave Henderson. He was conscious of no definite details that marked or occupied the passage of time. The library hour had come. He was on his way to the library now — with permission to get a book. He did not want a book. He was going to see Millman, and, God knew, he did not want to see Millman — to say good-by.

Mind, body, and soul were sick — sick with the struggle of the afternoon, sick with the ceaseless mental torment that made his temples throb and brought excruciating pain, and with the pain brought almost physical nausea; sick with the realization that his recompense for the five years of freedom he had sacrificed was only — wreckage, ruin and disaster.

He entered the little room. A guard lounged negligently against the wall. One of the two convict librarians was already busy with another convict — but it wasn't Millman who was busy. He saw Millman's cool, steady, gray eyes, read a sudden, startled something in them, and moved down to the end of the sort of wooden counter away from the guard — and handed in his book to be exchanged.

"What's the matter, Dave?" Millman, across the counter, back half turned to the guard, spoke in a low, hurried voice, as he pretended to examine the book. "I never saw you look like this before! Are you sick?"

"Yes," said Dave Henderson between his teeth. "Sick — as hell! I'm up against it, Charlie — and I guess it's all over except for one last little fight."

"What book do you want?" said Millman's voice coolly; but Millman's clean-

cut face with its strong jaw tightening a little, and Millman's clear, gray eyes with a touch of steel creeping into them, said: "Go on!"

"The police!" Dave Henderson spoke through the corner of his mouth without motion of the lips. "Barjan was here last night. And I got another tip to-day. The screws are going on—to a finish."

"You mean they're going to see that you don't get that money?"

Dave Henderson nodded curtly.

"Why not give it up then, Dave, and start a clean sheet?" asked Millman softly.

"Give it up!" The red had come into Dave Henderson's face, there was a savage tightening of his lips across his teeth. "I'll never give it up! D'ye think I've rotted here five years only to *crawl* at the end? By God! No! I'll get it—if they get me doing it!" His hoarse whisper caught and choked suddenly. "But it's hell, Charlie—hell! Hell to go under like that, just because there isn't a soul on God's wide earth I can trust to get it for me."

Millman turned away, and walked to the racks of books at the rear of the room.

Dave Henderson watched the other in a numbed sort of way. It was a curious kind of good-by he was saying to Millman. He wasn't quite sure, for that matter, just what he had said. He was soul sick, and body sick. Millman was taking a long while over the selection of a book—and he hadn't even asked for a book, let alone for any particular one. What did it matter? He didn't want anything to read. Reading wasn't any good to him any more! Barjan and Booky Skarvan had—

Millman was leaning over the counter again, a book in his hand.

"Would you trust *me*, Dave?" he asked quietly.

"You!" The blood seemed to quicken, and rush in a mad, swirling tide through Dave Henderson's veins. "Do you mean that, Charlie? Do you mean you'll help me?"

"Yes," said Millman. "If you want to trust me, I'll get that money for you. I'm going out to-morrow. But talk quickly! The guard's watching us and getting fidgety. Where is it?"

Dave Henderson rubbed his upper lip with the side of his forefinger as though it itched; the remaining fingers, spread out fanlike, screened his mouth.

"In the old pigeon-cote—shed back of Tooler's house where I used to live—you can get into the shed from the lane."

Millman laid the book on the counter—and pushed it toward Dave Henderson.

"All right," he said. "They won't be looking for it in New York. You've two months more here. Make it the 24th of June. That 'll give you time enough. I'll be registered at the St. Lucian Hotel—New York—eight o'clock in the evening—June 24. I'll hand the money over to you there, and—"

"You there, Five Fifty"—the guard was moving toward them from across the room—"you got your book, ain't you?"

Dave Henderson picked up the book, and turned toward the door.

"Good-by!" he flung over his shoulder.

"Good-by!" Millman answered.

CHAPTER III.

BREAD UPON THE WATERS.

IT was dark in the cell, quite dark. There was just the faint glimmer that crept in from the night lights along the iron galleries and came up from the main corridor two tiers below. It must have been hours since he had left Millman in the prison library, and yet he was not sure. Perhaps it was still early, for he hadn't yet heard old Tony talking and whispering to himself through the bars to-night.

Dave Henderson's head, cupped in his hands whose fingers dug with a brutal grip into the flesh of his cheeks, came upward with a jerk, and he surged to his feet from the hinged shelf that he called cot and bed. What difference did it make whether it was dark or light, or late or early, or whether old Tony had babbled to himself or not? It was pitifully inconsequential. It was only his brain staggering off into the byways again, as though, in some sneaking, underhand way, it wanted to steal rest and respite.

His hands went up above his head, and

held there, and his fists clenched. He was the fool of fools, the prince of fools! He saw it now! His laugh purled low, in hollow mirth, through the cell, a devil's laugh in its bitter irony. Yes, he saw it now—when it was too late.

Millman! Damn Millman to the pit! Damn Millman for the smoothest, craftiest hypocrite into whom God had ever breathed the breath of life! He had been trapped! That had been Millman's play, two years of cunning play—to win his confidence; two years of it, that always at the end the man might get that hundred thousand dollars. And he had fallen into Millman's trap!

He did not believe Millman's story, or in Millman's innocence, now—when it was too late. He couldn't reach Millman now. There were bars of iron, and steel doors, and walls of stone between himself and Millman's cell; and in the morning Millman would be gone, and Millman would have sixty-two—no, sixty-one—days to get that money and put the width of the world between them, before he, Dave Henderson, was free.

Sixty-one days! And in the space of one short moment, wrecking all that the toil and agony of years was to have stood for, he had told Millman what Millman wanted to know! And that was the moment Millman had been waiting for through two long years with cunning patience—and he, Dave Henderson, because he was shaken to the soul with desperation, because he was alone, with his back to the wall, in extremity, ready to grasp at any shred of hope, and because he was sick in body, and because the sudden, overwhelming uplift of Millman's offer had numbed and dulled his faculties in a mighty revulsion of relief, had fallen into the traitor's trap.

And it had been done so quickly! The guard had been there and had intervened, and there hadn't been time for his mind to win back its normal poise and reason logically.

He hadn't reasoned in that brief instant; he had only caught and grasped the outflung hand of one whom, for two years, he had trusted and believed was a friend. He hadn't reasoned then; he had even stepped out of the prison library more light-hearted than he had been almost from the moment they had put those striped clothes upon him five years before; but he had barely stood locked in his cell here again when, like some ghastly blight falling upon him, reason had come and left him a draggled weakling, scarcely able physically to stand upon his feet.

And then that had passed, and he had been possessed of an insensate fury that had bade him fling himself at the cell door and, with superhuman strength, wrench and tear the bars asunder that he might get at Millman again. He had checked that impulse amid the jeers and mockeries of impish voices that rang in his ears and filled the cell with their insane jabberings—voices that laughed in hellish glee at him for being a fool in the first place, and for his utter impotence in the second.

They were jeering and chuckling now, those insane demon voices. He swung from the center of the cell and flung himself down on the cot again. He had kept the secret of the hiding-place of that money to himself because, believing Millman to be an honest man, it would have been unfair to Millman to have told him; since, as an honest man, Millman would either have had to inform the authorities, or become a dishonest man.

It was clear enough, wasn't it, and logical enough? And yet, in one unguarded moment, he had repudiated his own logic. He had based all—his faith and trust and confidence in Millman, on the belief that Millman was an honest man. Well, an *honest* man wouldn't voluntarily aid and abet a thief in getting away with stolen money, nor make himself an accomplice after the fact, nor offer to help outwit the police, nor agree to participate in what amounted to stealing the money for the second time, and so make of himself a criminal. And if the man was then *dishonest*, and for two years had covered that dishonesty with a mask of hypocrisy, it was obvious enough, since the hypocrisy had been solely for his, Dave Henderson's, benefit, that Millman had planned it all patiently from the beginning, and now meant to do him cold, to get the money and keep it.

He could not remain still. He was up on his feet again from the cot. Fury had him in its grip once more. Five years! Five years of hell in this devil's hole, and a branded name! He had thrown everything into the balance—all he had—and now, *this!* Tricked! That was it—tricked—tricked by a Judas!

All the passion of the man was on the surface now. Lean and gaunt, his body seemed to crouch forward as though to spring; his hands, with fingers crooked like claws reaching for their prey, were outstretched before him. Sixty-one days' start Millman had. But Millman would need more than that!

The only man in the world whom he had ever trusted, and who had then betrayed him, would need more than sixty-one days to escape the reckoning that was to come. Millman might hide, Millman might live for years in lavish ease on that money, and in the end there might be none of that money left; but sooner or later Millman would pay a bigger price than a hundred thousand dollars. He would get Millman; the world wasn't big enough for the two of them.

And when that day came— His muscles relaxed; the paroxysm of fury left him, and suddenly he moaned a little as though in bitter hurt. There was another side to it. He could not help thinking of that other side. There had been two years of what he had thought was friendship—and the friendship had been hypocrisy. It was hard to believe.

Perhaps Millman meant to play square, after all; perhaps Millman would keep that rendezvous in New York on June 24, at eight o'clock in the evening at the St. Lucian Hotel. Perhaps Millman would. It wasn't only on account of the money that he hoped Millman would—there were those two years of what he had thought was friendship.

He leaned suddenly against the wall of the cell, the palms of his hands pressed against it, his face crushed into his knuckles. No! What was the use of that? Why try to delude himself again? Why try to make himself believe what he *wanted* to believe?

He could reason now coolly and logically enough. If Millman was honest, he would not do what he had offered to do; and being, therefore, dishonest, his apparent honesty had been only a mask, and the mask had been only for his benefit; and that, logically, could evidence but one thing—that Millman had deliberately set himself to win the confidence that would win for Millman the stake of one hundred thousand dollars. There was no other conclusion, was there?

His head came up from his hands, and he stood rigid, tense. Wait! Wait a minute until his brain cleared. There *was* another possibility. He had not thought of it before. It confused and staggered him now.

Suppose that Millman stood in with the police! Suppose that the police had used Millman for just the purpose that Millman had accomplished! Or—why not?—suppose that Millman was even one of the police himself? It was not as tenable a theory as it was to assume that Millman had acted as a stool-pigeon; but it was, even at that, well within the realms of possibility.

A man would not count two years ill-spent on a case that involved the recovery of a hundred thousand dollars—nor hesitate to play a convict's part, either, if necessary. It had been done before. Until Barjan had come last night, the police had made no sign for years—unless Millman were indeed one of them and, believing at last that he was facing failure, had called in Barjan. Millman hadn't had a hard time of it in the penitentiary. His education had been the excuse, if it were an excuse, for all the soft clerical jobs. Who was to know if Millman even spent the nights in his cell?

Dave Henderson crushed his fists against his temples. What did it matter? In the long run, what did it matter? Crook or informant, or an officer, Millman had wrecked him, and he would pay his debt to Millman. He laughed low again, while his teeth gnawed at his lips. There was Barjan and Booky Skarvan, and now Millman! And Baldy Vickers and the underworld!

There wasn't much chance, was there?

Not much to expect now in return for the eternities in which he had worn these prison stripes, not much out of the ruin of his life, not much for the all and everything he had staked and risked! Not much—only to make one last fight, to make as many of these men pay as dearly as he could. Yes, he would fight; he had never hedged—he would never hedge.

They had him with his back to the wall. He knew that. There wasn't much chance now; there wasn't *any*, if he looked the situation squarely in the face. But he was not beaten; they would never beat him. A knife-thrust or a blackjack from Booky Skarvan's skulking pack, though it might end his life, would not beat him; a further term here behind these walls, though it might wither up the soul of him, would not beat him.

And Millman! Up above his head his hands twisted and knotted together again, and the great muscular shoulders locked back, and the clean, straight limbs grew taut; and he laughed. And the laugh was very low and sinister. A beast cornered was an ugly thing. The dominant instinct in a beast was self-preservation—and a leap at its enemy's throat. A beast asked no quarter, and gave none.

He was a beast; they had made him a beast in here, an animal, a numbered thing, not a man; they had not even left him with a name—just one of a herd of beasts and animals. But they had not tamed him. He was alone, facing them all now, and there wasn't much chance because the odds were overwhelming; but if he was alone, he would not go *down* alone, and—

He turned his head suddenly, and his hands dropped to his sides. There had come a cry from somewhere. It was not very loud, but it rang in a startling way through the night silence of the prison. It was a cry as of sudden fear and weakness. It came again; and in a bound Dave Henderson reached the bars of his door, and beat upon them furiously with his fists. He would get into trouble for it undoubtedly, but he had placed that cry now. Old Tony wasn't whispering to-night. There was something wrong with the old bomb-thrower. Yes, he remembered—old Tony's strange appearance that afternoon. He rattled again and again on the bars. Old Tony was moaning now.

Footsteps on the run sounded along the iron gallery. A guard passed by; another paused at the door. He heard old Tony's door opened; then muffled voices; and then a voice that was quite audible—one of the guards:

"I guess he's snuffed out. Get the doc—and, yes, tell the warden, if he hasn't gone to bed yet."

Snuffed out! There was a queer, choking sensation in Dave Henderson's throat. A guard ran along the gallery. Dave Henderson edged silently close up to the door of his cell again.

There was no sound from within the other cell now. Snuffed out! The thought that old Tony was dead affected him in a numbed, groping sort of way. It had come with such startling suddenness. He had not grasped it yet. He wondered if he should be sorry or glad for old Tony—death was the lifer's goal.

He did not know. It brought, though, a great aching into his own soul. It seemed to stamp with the ultimate to-night the immeasurable void in his own life. Old Tony was the last link between himself and that thing of priceless worth that men called friendship. Millman had denied it, outraged it, betrayed it; and now old Tony had swerved in his allegiance and turned away at the call of a greater friend. Yes, death could not be anything but a friend to Tony. There seemed to be no longer any doubt of that in his mind.

Footsteps, several of them, came again along the iron gallery, racketing through the night, but they did not pass his cell this time; they came from the other direction, and went into Lomazzi's cell. It was strange that this should have happened to-night!

There would be no more shoulder-touch in the lock-step for the few days that were left; no smile of eyes and lips across the carpenter-shop; no surreptitious, intimate little gestures of open-hearted companionship! It seemed to crown in an appalling way, to bring home to him now with a new and appalling force, what five minutes

ago he had thought he had already appreciated to its fullest and bitterest depths—loneliness. He was alone—alone—alone. The murmur of voices came from the other cell. Time passed. He clung there to the bars. Alone, without help!

He drew back suddenly from the door, conscious for the first time that he must have been clutching and straining at the bars with all his strength. His fingers, relaxed now, were stiff, and the circulation seemed to have left them. A guard was opening the door. Behind the guard, that white-haired man was the warden. He had always liked the warden. The man was stern, but he was always just. He did not understand why the warden had come to his cell.

It was the warden who spoke:

"Lomazzi is dying. He has begged to be allowed to say good-by to you. I can see no objection. You may come."

Dave Henderson moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue.

"I—I thought I heard them say he was dead," he mumbled.

"He was unconscious," answered the warden briefly. "A heart attack. Step quickly; he has not many minutes."

Dave Henderson stepped out on the iron gallery, and paused an instant before the door of the adjoining cell. A form lay on the cot, a form with a pasty-colored face, a form whose eyes were closed. The prison doctor, a hypodermic syringe still in his hand, stood a little to one side. Dave Henderson swept his hand across his eyes—there was a sudden mist there that blurred the scene—and dropped beside the cot.

A hand reached out and grabbed his feebly; the dark eyes opened and fixed on him with a flicker of the old fire in their depths; and the lips quivered in a smile. Old Tony was whispering; old Tony always talked and whispered to himself here in his cell every night, but old Tony never disturbed anybody. It was hard to hear old Tony even when one listened attentively. Dave Henderson brushed his hand across his eyes again, and bent his head to the other's lips to catch the words.

"You make-a da fool play when you come in here, Dave—for me. But I never, never forget. Old Tony no forget. You no make-a da fool play when you get out. Old Tony knows. You need-a da help. Listen — Nicolo Capriano—Frisco. You understand? Tony Lomazzi send-a you. Tony Lomazzi take-a da life prison for Nicolo. Nicolo will pay back to Tony's friend. You did not think that"—the voice was growing feebler, harder to understand, and it was fluttering now—"that, because old Tony call-a you da fool, he did—did not—remember—and—and—"

Some one disengaged Dave Henderson's hand from the hand that was clasped around it and that had suddenly twitched and, with a spasmodic clutch, had seemed as though striving to maintain its hold. The prison doctor's voice sounded muffled in the cell:

"He is dead."

Dave Henderson looked up at the touch of a guard's hand on his shoulder. The guard jerked his head with curt significance in the direction of the door of Dave Henderson's cell.

BOOK III

Paths of the Underworld

CHAPTER I.

THE DOOR ON THE LANE.

WAS that a shadow cast by the projection of the door porch out there across the street, or was it *more* than a shadow? It was true that, to a remarkable degree, one's eyes became accustomed to the murk, almost akin to blackness, of the ill-lighted streets; but the mind did not accommodate itself so readily. It peopled space with its own imaginations; it created, rather than descried.

Dave Henderson shook his head in grim uncertainty. He could not be sure what it was out there. With the black back-

ground of the unlighted room behind him he could not be seen at the window by any one on the street, which was two stories below, and he had been watching here since it had grown dark. In that time he had seen a dozen shadows that he could have sworn were not shadows—and yet they were no more than that after all. He was only sure of one thing—that out there somewhere, perhaps nowhere within eye-range of his window, perhaps even half a block away, but somewhere, some one was watching.

He had been sure of that during every hour of his new-found freedom, since he had reached Frisco that noon. He had been sure of it intuitively; but he had failed signally to identify any one specifically as having dogged or followed him. Freedom! He laughed a little harshly. There weren't any stone walls any more; this window in front of him wasn't grated, nor the door of the room steel-barred, nor out there in the corridor was there any uniformed guard—and so it was freedom.

The short, harsh laugh was on his lips again. Freedom! It was a curious freedom, then! He could walk at will out there in the streets—within limits. But he did not dare go yet to that shed where Mrs. Tooler's old pigeon-cote was. The money probably wasn't there, anyhow—Millman almost certainly had won the first trick and had got away with it; but it was absolutely necessary that he should be sure.

He had freedom; but he dared go nowhere to procure a steel jimmy, for instance, or a substitute for a steel jimmy, with which to force that shed door; nor had he dared to go anywhere and buy a revolver with which to arm himself, and of which he stood desperately in need. He had only the few dollars with which he had left the penitentiary, it was true; but he knew where, under ordinary circumstances, he could obtain those things without any immediate outlay of money—only it was a moral certainty that every move he made was watched.

If he procured, say, a chisel—if he procured, say, a revolver—he was not fool enough to imagine that such facts would be hidden long from those who watched. They would be suspicious facts. It was his play now to create no suspicion. He could make no move until he had definitely and conclusively identified and placed those who were watching him; and then, with that point settled, it should not be very hard to throw the watchers off the track long enough to enable him to visit Mrs. Tooler's pigeon-cote, and far more important, his one vital objective now, old Tony Lomazzi's friend Capriano.

His jaws locked. He meant to force that issue to-night, even if he could not discriminate between shadows and realities out there through the window. He had a definite plan worked out in his mind—including a visit to Square John Kelly's. He hadn't been to Square John's yet. To have gone there immediately on reaching San Francisco would have been a fool play. It would have been not only risky for himself, but risky for Square John; and he had to protect Square John from the searching and pertinent questions that would then have certainly ensued. He was going there to-night, casually, as simply to one of many similar places—that was part of his plan.

And now he smiled in mingled bitterness and menace. The underworld had complimented him once on being the possessor of potentialities that could make of him the slickest crook in the United States. He had not forgotten that. The underworld, or at least a section of it in the persons of Baldy Vickers and his gang, was leagued against him now, as well as the police. He would strive to merit the underworld's encomium!

He turned suddenly away from the window, walked in the darkness to the table in the center of the room, and, groping for his hat, made his way to the door. He had not expected much from this vigil at the window, but there had always been the possibility that it would be productive, and the earlier hours of the evening could have been employed in no better way. It was dark enough now to begin his night's work in earnest. It must be between half past nine and ten o'clock.

There was a dim light in the corridor; but, dim though it was, it did not hide the ragged, threadbare state of the carpet on

the hallway and stairs, nor the lack of paint, or even of soap and water, on doors and woodwork.

Pelatt's Hotel was as shabby as the shabby quarter in which it was located, and as shabby as the shabby patrons to whom it catered. But there were not many places where a man with close-cropped hair and wearing black clothes of blatant prison cut could go, and he had known Pelatt in the old days, and Pelatt, in lieu of baggage, hadn't demanded any cash in advance—he had even advanced Dave Henderson a little cash himself.

Dave Henderson reached the ground floor, and gained the street through a small, dingy office that was for the moment deserted. He paused here for an instant, the temptation strong upon him to cross the street and plunge into those shadows at the side of that porch just opposite to him. His lips grew tight. The temptation was strong, almost overpoweringly strong; he would much rather fight that way.

And then he shrugged his shoulders, and started along the street. Since he had left the penitentiary he had not given the slightest sign that he had even a suspicion he was being watched; and, more than ever, he could not afford to do so now. There were two who could play at the game of laying traps!

And, besides, the chances were a thousand to one that there were nothing but shadows over there; and there were the same odds that some one who was not a shadow would see him make the telltale investigation.

He could not afford to take a chance. He could not afford to fail now. He had to identify beyond question of doubt the man or men who were on his trail, if there were any; or, with equal certainty, establish it as a fact that he was letting what he called his intuition run away with him. There came a grim smile to his lips as he went along. Intuition wasn't all he had to guide him, was it?

Barjan had not minced words in making it clear that he would be watched, and Booky Skarvan had made an even more ominous threat! Who was it to-night, then—the police, or the underworld, or both?

He had given no sign that he had any suspicions. He had gone to Pelatt's openly; after that, in an apparently aimless way, as a man almost childishly interested in the most trivial things after five years of imprisonment, he had roamed about the streets that afternoon.

But his wanderings had not been entirely aimless. He had located Nicolo Capriano's house—and, strangely enough, his wanderings had quite inadvertently taken him past that house several times. It was in a shabby quarter of the city, too. Also, it was a curious sort of house; that is, it was a curious sort of house when compared with its neighbors.

It was one of a row of frame houses in none too good repair, and it was the second house from the corner; the directory had supplied him with the street and number. The front of the house differed in no respect from those on each side of it—it was the rear that had particularly excited his attention. He had not been able to investigate it closely, of course, but it bordered on a lane, and by walking down the cross street one could see it. It had an extension built on that reached almost to the high fence at the edge of the lane, and the extension, weather-beaten in appearance, looked to be almost as old as the house itself.

Not so very curious, after all, except that no other house had that extension—and except that, in view of the fact that one Nicolo Capriano lived there, it was at least suggestive. Its back entrance was extremely easy of access.

Dave Henderson turned abruptly in through the door of a saloon and, leaning against the bar—well down at the far end where he could both see and be seen every time the door was opened—ordered a drink. He had thought a good deal about Nicolo Capriano in the two months since old Tony Lomazzi had ended his life sentence. He hadn't "got" it all at the moment when the old bomb-thrower had died. It had been mostly old Tony himself who was in his thoughts then, and the reference to Capriano had seemed no more than just a kindly thought on old Tony's part for a friend who had no other friend on earth.

But afterward, and not many hours afterward, it had all taken on a vastly different perspective. The full significance of Tony's words had come to him, and this in turn had stirred his memories of earlier days in San Francisco; and he remembered Nicolo Capriano.

The barkeeper slid a bottle and whisky-glass toward him. Dave Henderson half turned his back to the street door, resting his elbow negligently on the bar. He waited a moment until the barkeeper's attention was somewhat diverted, then his fingers, cupped around the small glass, completely hiding it; and the bottle, as he raised it in the other hand, was hidden from the door by the broad of his back. He poured out a few drops, sufficient to rob the glass of its cleanness.

The barkeeper looked around. Dave Henderson hastily set the bottle down, like a child caught in a misdemeanor, hastily raised the glass to his lips, threw back his head, and gulped. The barkeeper scowled. It was the trick of the saloon vulture—not only a full glass, but a little over for good measure, when, through practise, the forefinger and thumb became a sort of annex to the rim. Dave Henderson stared back in sullen defiance, set the glass down on the bar, drew the back of his hand across his lips, and went out.

He hesitated a moment outside the saloon, as though undecided which way to go next, while his eyes, under the brim of his slouch-hat, which was pulled forward almost to the bridge of his nose, scanned both sides of the street and in both directions. He moved on again along the block. Yes, he remembered Nicolo Capriano. Capriano must be a pretty old man now—as old as Tony Lomazzi. There had been a great deal of talk about a gang of Italian black-handers in those days, when he was a boy, and Capriano had been a sort of hero-bandit, he remembered; and there had been a mysterious society, and bomb-throwing, and a reign of terror carried on that had paralyzed the police.

They had never been able to convict Nicolo Capriano, though it was common knowledge that the police believed him to be the brains and front of the organization. Always something, or some one, had stood between Capriano and prison bars—like Tony Lomazzi, for instance.

He did not remember Lomazzi's trial, nor the details of the particular crime for which Lomazzi was convicted; but that, perhaps, had put an end to the gang's work. Certainly, Capriano's activities were a thing of the past; it was all a matter of years ago. Capriano was never heard of now; but even if the man, through force of circumstances, was obliged to live a retired existence, that in no way robbed him of his cleverness nor made him less valuable as a prospective ally.

Capriano was the one man who could help him. Capriano must still possess underground channels that would be of incalculable value in aiding him to track Millman down.

His fists, hidden in the side pockets of his coat, clenched fiercely. That was it—Millman! There wasn't a chance but that Millman had taken the money from the pigeon-cote. He would see, of course, before many hours; but there wasn't a chance. It was Millman he wanted now. The possibility that had occurred to him in prison of Millman being a stool-pigeon, or even one of the police, no longer held water.

If the money had been recovered it would be publicly known. It hadn't been recovered. Therefore, it was Millman he must find, and it was Nicolo Capriano's help he wanted.

But he must protect Capriano. He would owe Capriano that—that it should not be known there was anything between Nicolo Capriano and Dave Henderson. Well, he was doing that now, wasn't he? Neither Square John Kelly nor Nicolo Capriano would in any way be placed under suspicion through his visits to them tonight!

The saloons appeared to be Dave Henderson's sole attraction in life now. He went from one to another, and he passed none by, and he went nowhere else—and he left a trail of barkeepers' scowls behind him. One drink in each place, with five fingers curled around the glass, hiding the few drops the glass actually contained,

while it proclaimed to the barkeeper the gluttonous and greedy imposition of the professional bum, wore out his welcome as a customer.

If the resultant scowl from behind the bar was not suggestive enough, it was augmented by an uncompromising request to "beat it!" He appeared to be possessed of an earnest determination to make a night of it—and also of an equally earnest determination to get as much liquor for as little money as possible. And the record he left behind him bore unimpeachable testimony to that purpose.

He appeared to grow a little unsteady on his feet; he was even lurching quite noticeably when, an hour later, the lighted windows of Square John Kelly's Pacific Coral saloon, his first real objective, flung an inviting ray across his path. He stood still here full in the light, both of the window and a street lamp, and shook his head in well-simulated, grave, and dubious inebriety.

He began to fumble in his pockets; he fished out a dime from one and a nickel from another—a further and still more industrious search apparently proved abortive. For a long time he appeared to be absorbed in a lugubrious contemplation of the two coins that lay in the palm of his hand; but under his hat-brim his eyes marked a man in a brown-peaked cap who was approaching the door of the saloon. This was the second time in the course of the last half-hour—since he had begun to show signs that the whisky was getting the better of him—that he had seen the man in the brown-peaked cap.

There were swinging wicker doors to the saloon, and the man pushed these open and went in—but he did not go far. Dave Henderson's lips thinned grimly. The bottom of the swinging doors was a good foot and a half above the level of the sidewalk; but, being so far gone in liquor, he would hardly be expected to notice the fact that the man's boots remained visible, and that the man was standing there motionless.

Dave Henderson took the street-lamp into his confidence.

"Ol' Kelly," said Dave thickly. "Uster know Kelly—Square John. Gotta have money. Whatsh matter with touching Kelly? Eh—whatsh matter with that?"

He lurched toward the swinging doors. The boots retreated suddenly. He pushed his way through and stood surveying the old-time familiar surroundings owlishly. The man with the brown-peaked cap was leaning against the bar close to the door; a half-dozen others were ranged farther down along its length; and at its lower end, lounging against the wall of the little private office, was a squat, paunchy man with a bald head and florid face and keen, gray eyes under enormously bushy gray eyebrows.

It was Kelly, just as Kelly used to be—even to the massive gold watch-chain stretched across the vest, with the massive gold fraternity emblem dangling down from the center.

"'Ello, Kelly!" Dave Henderson called out effusively, and made rapid, though somewhat erratic, progress across the room to Kelly's side. "Glad t' see you, ol' boy!" He gave Kelly no chance to say anything. He caught Kelly's hand and pumped it up and down. "Sure, you know me! Dave Henderson—ol' days at the track, eh? Been away on a vacation. Come back—broke." His voice took on a drunkenly confidential tone that could be heard everywhere in the saloon. "Shay, could I see you a minute in private?"

A man at the bar laughed. Dave Henderson wheeled belligerently. Kelly intervened.

Perplexity, mingling with surprise and disapproval, stamped Kelly's florid face.

"Yes, I know you well enough; but I didn't expect to see you like this, Dave!" he said shortly. He jerked his hand toward the door of the private office. "I'll talk to you in there."

Dave Henderson entered the office. Kelly shut the door behind them.

"You're drunk!" he said sternly.

Dave Henderson shook his head.

"No," he said quietly. "I'm followed. Do you think I'm a fool, John? Did you ever see me drunk? They're shadowing me, that's all; and I had to get my money from you, and keep your skirts clean, and spot the shadow, all at the same time."

Kelly's jaw sagged helplessly.

"Good God!" he ejaculated heavily. "Dave, I—"

"Don't let's talk, John—now," Dave Henderson interrupted. "There isn't time. It won't do for me to stay in here too long. You've got my money ready, haven't you?"

Kelly nodded—still a little helplessly.

"Yes," he said; "it's ready. I've been looking for you all afternoon. I knew you were coming out to-day." He went over to a safe in the corner, opened it, took out a long envelope, and handed the envelope to Dave Henderson. "It's all there, Dave—and five years' interest compounded. A little over four thousand dollars—four thousand and fifteen, as near as I could figure it. It's all in five hundreds and hundreds, except the fifteen; I didn't think you'd want to pack a big wad."

"Good old Square John!" said Dave Henderson softly. He opened the envelope, took out the fifteen dollars, shoved the large bills into his pocket, tucked a five-dollar bill into another pocket, and held out the remaining ten to Kelly.

"Go out there and get me ten dollars from the cash register, John, will you?" he said. "Let them see you doing it. Get the idea? I'd like them to know you came across, and that I've got something to spend."

Kelly's eyes puckered in an anxious way as they scrutinized Dave Henderson's face; but the anxiety, it was obvious enough, was all for Dave Henderson.

"You mean there's some one out there now?" he asked as he moved toward the door.

"Yes," said Dave Henderson with a grim little smile. "See if you know that fellow with the brown-peaked cap up at the front end of the bar."

Kelly was gone a matter of two or three minutes. He came back and returned the ten dollars to Dave Henderson.

"Know the man?" asked Dave Henderson.

"Yes," said Kelly. "His name's Speen—he's a plain-clothes man." He shook his head in a troubled way, and suddenly laid both hands on Dave Henderson's shoulders. "Dave, what are you going to do?"

Dave Henderson laughed shortly.

"Do you want to know?" He flung out the words in a sort of bitter gibe. "Well, I'll tell you—in confidence. I'm going to blow the head off a *friend* of mine."

Dave Henderson felt the hands on his shoulders tighten.

"What's the use, Dave?" said Square John Kelly quietly. "I suppose it has something to do with that Tydeman wad; but what's the use? You've got four thousand dollars. Why not start clean again? The other don't pay, Dave, and—" He stopped.

Dave Henderson's face had hardened like flint.

"There's a good deal you don't know," he said evenly. "And I guess the less you know the safer you'll be. I owe you a lot, John; and the only way I can square it now is to tell you to stand from under. What you say, though I know you mean it, doesn't make any dint in five years of hell. I've got a debt to pay, and I'm going to pay it.

"Maybe I'll see you again—maybe I won't. But even a prison-bird can say God bless you, and mean it; and that's what I say to you. They won't have any suspicions that there's anything of any kind between you and me; but they'll naturally come here to see if they can get any information, when that fellow Speen out there turns in his report.

"You can tell them you advised me to start clean again, and you can tell them that I swear I don't know where that hundred thousand dollars is. They won't believe it, and you don't believe it. But let it go at that.

"I don't know what's going to break loose, but you stand from under, John. I'm going now, to get acquainted with Mr. Speen. It wouldn't look just right, in my supposed condition, for you to let me have another drink in your place, after having staked me; but I've got to make at least a bluff at it. You stay here for a few minutes—and then come out and chase me home."

He held out his hand, wrung Square John Kelly's in a hard grip, turned abruptly away, and staggered out into the barroom.

Clutching his ten dollars in his hand and glancing furtively back over his shoulder every step or two, Dave Henderson neared the door.

Here, apparently reassured that his benefactor was not watching him, and apparently succumbing to an irresistible temptation, he sidled up to the bar beside the man with the brown-peaked cap.

"Kelly's all right—s'all right," he confided thickly to the other. "Ol' friend. Never turns down ol' friend in hard luck. Square John — betcher life! Have a drink?"

"Sure!" said the man in the brown-peaked cap.

The drink was ordered, and as Dave Henderson, talking garrulously, poured out his whisky—a genuine glassful this time—he caught sight, in the mirror behind the bar, and out of the corner of his eye, of Kelly advancing down the room from the private office.

As he lifted his glass, Kelly's hand, reaching from behind, caught the glass and set it back on the bar.

"You promised me you'd go home, and cut this out!" said Kelly in sharp reproof. "Now go on!" He turned on the detective. "Yes, and you, too. Get out of here. You ought to know better. The man's had enough. Haven't you got anything else to do than hang around bumming drinks? I know you, and I've a mind to report you. Get out!"

Dave Henderson slunk out through the door without protest.

On the sidewalk the man with the brown-peaked cap joined him.

"Kelly's sore." Dave Henderson's tones were heavy with tolerant pity and magnanimous forgiveness. "Ol' friend—be all right to-morrow. Letsh go somewhere else for a drink. Whatsher shay?"

"Sure!" said the man in the brown-peaked cap.

The detective was complacently agreeable to all suggestions. It was Dave Henderson who acted as guide; and he began a circuit of saloons in a direction that brought him sensibly nearer at each visit to the street and house occupied by one Nicolo Capriano. In the same block with Capriano's house he had noticed that there was also a saloon; and if Capriano's house had an exit on the lane, so, likewise, it was logical to presume, had the saloon.

And that saloon now, barring intermediate stops, was his objective. But he was in no hurry.

There was one point on which he had still to satisfy himself before he gave this man Speen the slip in that saloon and, by the lane, gained the rear door of Nicolo Capriano's house. He knew now that he was dealing with the police; but was Speen detailed *alone* in the case, or did Speen have assistance at hand in the background—assistance enough, say, to have scared off any move on the part of Booky Skarvan's and Baldy Vickers's gang, of whom, certainly, he had seen nothing as yet?

A half-hour passed. Several saloons were visited. Dave Henderson no longer cupped his hand around his glass. Having had nothing to start with, he could drink frankly, and a shaky hand could be trusted to spill any overgenerous portions. They became confidential. He confided to Speen what Speen already knew—that he *was* Dave Henderson, and just out from the penitentiary.

Speen, stating that his name was Monahan, reciprocated with mendacious confidences that implied he was puritanical in neither his mode of life nor his means of livelihood—and began to throw out hints that he was not averse to a share in any game that Dave Henderson might have on hand.

Dave Henderson got along very badly now between the various oases that quenched his raging thirst. He leaned heavily on Speen, he stumbled frequently, and, in stumbling, obtained equally frequent views of both sides of the street behind him.

No one seemed to be paying any attention to his companion or himself, and yet once or twice he had caught sight of skulking figures that, momentarily at least, had aroused his suspicions. But in this neighborhood there were many skulking figures. Again he could not be sure; but the saloon in Capriano's block was the next one ahead now, and certainly nothing

had transpired that would seem to necessitate any change being made in his plans.

Speen, too, was feigning now a certain degree of intoxication. They reached the saloon, reeled through the door arm in arm, and ranged up alongside the bar. Dave Henderson's eyes swept his surroundings, critical of every detail. It was an unpleasant and dirty place; and the few loungers, some seated at little tables, some hanging over the bar itself, were a hard and ugly-looking lot.

The clientele, however, interested Dave Henderson very little—at the rear of the room, and but a few yards from the end of the bar, there was an open door, disclosing a short passage beyond, that interested him a great deal more! Beyond that passage was undoubtedly the back yard, and beyond that again was the lane.

He had no desire to harm Speen; none whatever. But if any one of a dozen pretexts that he might make to elude the man for the few moments that were necessary to gain the yard unobserved did not succeed, and Speen persisted in following him out there into the yard—well, so much the worse for Speen, that was all!

He was arguing now with Speen, each claiming the right to pay for the drink—but his mind was sifting through those dozen pretexts for the most plausible one to employ. He kept on arguing. Customers slouched in and out of the place; some sat down at the tables, some came to the bar. One, a hulk of a man, unshaven, with bull-breadth shoulders, with nose flattened over on one side of his cheek, stepped up to the bar beside Speen.

Speen's back was turned, but the man grinned hospitably at Dave Henderson over Speen's shoulder as he listened to the argument for a moment.

"Put away your money, son, an' have a drink with me," he invited.

Speen turned.

The grin on the battered face of the newcomer faded instantly as he stared, with apparently sudden recognition, into Speen's face; and a black, ugly scowl spread over the already unhandsome features.

"Oh, it's *you,* is it?" he said hoarsely, and licked his lips. "By God, you got a nerve to come down here—you have! You dirty police spy!"

Speen was evidently not easily stampeded. He eyed the other levelly.

"I guess you've got the wrong man, haven't you?" he said coolly enough. "My name's Monahan, and I don't know you."

"You lie!" snarled the other viciously. "Your name's Speen! And you don't know me—*don't you?*"

"No," said Speen.

"You don't, eh?" The man thrust his face almost into Speen's. "You don't remember a year ago gettin' me six months on a fake plant, either, I suppose!"

"No," said Speen.

"You don't, eh?" snarled the man again. "A hell of a bad memory you've got, ain't you? Well, I'll fix it for you so's you won't forget me so easy next time, and—"

It came quick, without warning—before Dave Henderson could move. He saw a great, grimy fist whip forward to the point of Speen's jaw, and he caught a tiny reflected gleam of light from an ugly brass knuckle-duster on one of the fingers of the clenched fist; and Speen's knees seemed to crumple up under him, and he went down in a heap to the floor.

Dave Henderson straightened up from the bar, a hard, grim smile twisting across his lips. It had been a brutal act. Speen might be a policeman, and Speen, lying there senseless, solved a certain little difficulty without further effort on his, Dave Henderson's, part; but the brutality of the act had him in its grip.

There was a curious itching at his fingertips for a clutch that would maul this already battered bruiser's face beyond recognition. His eyes circled the room. The men at the tables had risen to their feet; some were pushing forward, and one, he saw over his shoulder, ran around the far end of the bar and disappeared. Speen lay inert, a huddled thing on the floor, a crimson stream spilling its way down over the man's white collar.

The twisted smile on Dave Henderson's lips deepened. The bruiser was watching him like a cat, and there was a leer on the

other's face that seemed to possess some hidden significance. Well, perhaps he would change that leer, with whatever its significance might be, into something still more unhappy!

He moved a few inches out from the bar. He wanted room for arm-play now, and—The street door opened. Four or five men were crowding in. He caught a glimpse of a face among them that he knew—a little, wizen face, crowned with flaming red hair—Runty Mott!

And then the lights went out.

Quick as a lightning flash Dave Henderson dropped to his hands and knees. There was a grunt above him, as though from the swing of a terrific blow that, meeting with no resistance, had overreached itself in mid air—then the forward lunge of a heavy body, a snarl, an oath as the bruiser stumbled over Dave Henderson's crouched form, and then a crash as Dave Henderson grappled, low down at the other's knees, and the man went to the floor.

But the other, for all his weight and bulk, was lithe and agile, and his arms, flung out, circled and locked around Dave Henderson's neck.

The place was in pandemonium. Feet scuffled; chairs and tables toppled over in the darkness. Shouts, yells, and curses made a din infernal. Dave Henderson wrenched and tore at the arms around his neck. He saw it all now—all. The police had trailed him; Baldy Vickers's gang had trailed the police. The bruiser was one of the gang. They had to get rid of the police, in the person of Speen, to cover their own trail again before they got him. And they, too, had thought him drunk and an easy prey.

With Speen unconscious from a quarrel that even Speen, when he recovered, would never connect with its real purpose, they meant to kidnap him, Dave Henderson, and get him away in the confusion without any of the innocent bystanders in the place knowing what was going on.

That was why the lights had gone off. That man he had seen running around the upper end of the room—he remembered now—the man had come in just behind the bruiser—that accounted for the lights—they wouldn't dare shoot—he had that advantage—dead, he wasn't any good to them—they wanted that—hundred thousand dollars.

He was choking. Instead of arms, steel fingers had sunk into his throat. He lunged out with all his strength. His fist met something that, though it yielded slightly, brought a brutal twinge of pain across his knuckles. His fist shot out again, whipped to its mark with everything that was in him behind the blow; it was the bruiser's face he had hit. He hit it again, and, over the mad fury that was in him, he knew an unholy joy as his blows crashed home. The steel fingers around his throat relaxed and fell away.

He staggered to his feet. A voice from somewhere close at hand spoke hoarsely:

"Scrag him, Mugsy! See that he's knocked cold before we carry him out!"

There was no answer from the floor.

Dave Henderson's lips were no longer twisted in a smile; they were thinned and straight; he knew why there was no answer from the floor. He crouched, gathering himself for a spring. Dark, shadowy forms were crowding in around him. There was only one chance—the door now, the rear door, and the lane!

Voices growled and cursed seemingly almost in his ears. They had him hemmed against the bar without knowing it, as they clustered around the spot where they expected he was being strangled into unconsciousness on the floor.

"Mugsy, d'ye hear? Damn you, d'ye hear? Why don't you—"

Dave Henderson launched himself forward. A wild yell went up. Hands clutched at him, and tore at his clothing, and struck at his face; forms flung themselves at his shoulders, and clung around his legs. He shook them off, and gained a few yards. He was fighting like a madman now—and now the darkness was in his favor.

They came on again in a blind rush. The door could not be far away. He stumbled over one of the small tables, recovered himself, and, snatching up the table, whirled it by one of its legs in a sweep around his head. There was a smash of impact that

almost knocked the table from his grasp—and, coincidentally, a scream of pain. It cleared a space about him. He swung again, whirling the table around and around his head, gaining impetus—and suddenly sent it catapulting from him full into the shadowy forms in front of him, and, turning, made a dash for the end of the room.

He reached the wall and groped along it for the door. The door! Where was it? He felt the warm blood trickling down over his face. He did not remember when that had happened. He could not see—but they would turn on the lights surely now in an instant, if they were not fools; and he must find the door first, or he was trapped. That was his only chance—the place was a bedlam of hideous riot—curse the blood, it seemed to be running into his eyes now—Runty Mott—if only he could settle—

His fingers touched and felt around the jamb of the open door—and he surged, panting, through the doorway. The short passage ended in another door. He opened this, found the yard in front of him, dashed across it, and hurled himself over the fence into the lane.

The uproar, the yells, the furious shouts from behind him seemed suddenly to increase in volume. He ran the faster. They had turned the lights on—and found him gone! From somewhere in the direction of the street there came the shrill *cheep-cheep* of a patrolman's whistle. Yes, he quite understood that, too—there would be a riot call pulled in a minute, but that made little difference to him. It was the gangsters, who were now probably pouring out of the saloon's back door in pursuit of him, with whom he had to reckon. But he should be safe now—he was abreast of Capriano's house, which he could distinguish even in the darkness because the extension stuck out like some great, black, looming shadow from the row of other houses.

There was a gate here, somewhere, or a door in the fence, undoubtedly; but he had no time to hunt for gate or door, perhaps only to find it locked. The fence was quicker and easier. He swung himself up and over—and, scarcely a yard away, found himself confronted with what looked like an enclosed porch or vestibule to the Italian's back door.

He was quick now, but equally silent in his movements. From the direction of the saloon shouts reached him, the voices no longer muffled, but as though they were out in the open—in the back yard of the saloon, or perhaps by now in the lane itself.

He stepped inside the porch and knocked softly on the door; he knocked again and again. It seemed as though the seconds dragged themselves out into immeasurable spaces of time. He swept the blood out of his eyes once more, and, his ears strained laneward, continued to knock insistently, louder and louder.

A light footstep, hurried, sounded from within. It halted on the other side of the closed door. He had a feeling that somehow, even through that closed door, and even in the darkness, he was under inspection. The next instant he was sure of it. Above his head a small incandescent bulb suddenly flooded the porch with light, and fell upon him as he stood there, a ghastly object with bloody face and torn clothes.

From behind the closed door came a girl's startled gasp of dismay and alarm; from up the lane now unmistakably came the pounding of racing feet.

"Quick!" whispered Dave Henderson hoarsely. "I'm from Tony Lomazzi. For God's sake, put out that light!"

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

The Living Child

by Mary Lerner

AT first, of course, I thought it was one of the maids. It was a woman's voice, and Janeway, I knew lived alone with his little daughter and a couple of servants since his divorce. Alone, that is, when he was not entertaining. He entertained a good deal, riotously, and, when the night was far spent and himself in an exalted mood, sometimes waked Camilla and brought her down to the table. He was very proud of her, for she was a beautiful child, robust and spirited, and patterned closely after her father, so closely, indeed, as to suggest disquieting future possibilities to one who knew Richard Janeway as intimately as did his family physician.

He had unlimited custody of Camilla, for he had divorced his wife, though she was innocent, while his own irregular mode of life was a matter of common knowledge. Against Ruth Janeway there was, to my mind, but one charge, one failure in steadfastness. Loving young Phillip Inches, she had allowed herself, a poor girl with dependent, invalid mother, to be dazzled by Janeway's sumptuous wooing. A lover's quarrel, Phillip's prolonged absence and silence, a crisis in her home life, and, Ruth, distrusting Janeway as she did even then, consented to a hasty marriage. Two weeks after the wedding—Ruth forced Janeway to return to town on discovering he was even then continuing an intrigue with one of his old flames at the fashionable resort to which he had taken her—Inches returned, in a passion of repentance, to claim her.

Observing her scarlet and miserable in a box with Janeway, who, flushed and sparkling, was carrying on a picturesque flirtation—Janeway could conduct the most flagrant affair with a winning and debonair boyishness that was charming in the extreme—with the light singer of the moment, Phillip rushed round and burst in upon them between the acts. Ruth's face lit up at sight of him; she held out both hands, like an eager child. For the moment, he was the only person in the world; she had utterly forgotten Janeway.

Janeway, disturbed, looked from one to the other, with smiling alertness. It seemed as if, from that moment, he began to plan his way out; he must have been weary of his new bargain even then.

Her soft eyes on Phillip, Ruth shrank and paled piteously, like a child that has, heedlessly enough, committed some terrible crime, and who, with fluttering, beseeching gestures, implores you not to cast her off on that account. Ruth's hands were peculiarly eloquent — her whole graceful person, indeed. This expressiveness was her greatest charm, though her little face was charming enough, with its clear, pearly pallor, its level brows, its ash-blond hair which made her small head look like a full-blown primrose, her childish red mouth, her cleft chin, and her long, rather deep-set and shadowed eyes of an unusually warm and living brown.

It was evident that Phillip demanded that she come home with him.

Ruth was seen to incline her head toward Janeway, while her vivid eyes never left the other man's startled face. She made her pitiful confession: "My husband."

Phillip bowed dumbly, strickenly. Janeway glanced from one to the other, and laughed, as if amused by the antics of a couple of children. Then, nonchalantly, he turned away.

For an interminable moment, Ruth and Inches looked at each other, as if it were the last opportunity of a lifetime. Then, wheeling, the young man stumbled out of the box. Ruth sat motionless, hung with her ropes of pearls, staring blindly at the curtains which had fallen behind him.

Within the year, Camilla was born.

For a time, so great was their devotion to the child—Janeway in particular was actually ravished by the small being that clung so strongly to his big fist, roared so manfully at his departures, and twinkled back at him with her own bright blue eye—things went better with them. Janeway was more considerate of his wife, did not insult the dignity of her position with such open infidelities. He had always been kind enough, as men of his sort so often are, and breezily good-natured. After all, he owed her Camilla. I think Ruth was almost happy at this interval. Inches had disappeared completely, her invalid mother had died; but she had her baby.

When Camilla was four, a particularly insolent lady of Janeway's came to the house and made a scene. Even his mother, heretofore bitter against the young wife for presuming to assume censorship of her husband's peccadillos, was heard to remark in her ringing, quarter-deck voice that this was letting things go a bit far, even for a Janeway. Just then Phillip Inches, rather gaunt in the face and gray about the temples, came home. Ruth lost her head. She went to see him, alone.

Of course the two young things meant to do everything aboveboard. They felt, under the circumstances, they had the right. Ruth's suit for divorce would surely be uncontested—Janeway, aside from his one failing, would be sure to play fair—the child would be removed from her father's influence, and the three of them would live decent, secure, frugal lives. Ruth would not touch a penny of the Janeway money, even for Camilla.

But Janeway surprised them. He did not play fair. Stand another man's making love to Ruth he would not, and besides he was tired of her reproaches. She had even set her mother after him now—his mother who had always been so loyal, so tolerant, so sensible. If he did not look sharp, she would be taking the child away from him, and bringing her up in her own canting, bloodless likeness. And that, he thought with a chuckle, wouldn't be at all to Camilla's taste.

So he put detectives after Ruth, brought sudden suit during an ill-advised absence of Phillip's, and took the child away from *her*. He had the smartest, most unscrupulous lawyers in the country, and Ruth Janeway was divorced for infidelity.

She sent a wild message to Inches, but his work had taken him out of reach of telegrams. When he returned, Ruth, penniless, discredited, alone, had resumed her old position with a firm of patent attorneys. Hurrying to Ruth's office, Phillip, as he reentered the elevator at the third floor after having stepped out to allow some ladies to alight, caught, in some fatal fashion, his long ulster in the sliding door. So he never had a chance to stand by Ruth, after all; never had a chance, if his own slender means would have permitted, to attempt to reopen her case.

Ruth's last hope died with him. At twenty-six, her beauty dimmed, her spirit broken, her child fated to be cut off from her by alien luxury and still more alien moral codes, she was lost to sight among a cityful of office drudges. She still kept alive, however, a certain integrity of balance and sanity, where many another woman, not overrugged, would have fallen into nervous crises of morbid despair. She went to see Camilla as often as the child visited at her grandmother's, denying herself many a necessity to buy for the imperious little girl modest luxuries which paled into miserly insignificance beside the lavishness of her every-day surroundings.

For a child is an undiscriminating little monster and loves a full cupboard, a rich and generous provider. It was one of Ruth's sharpest sorrows to be obliged thus to make a bid, as it were, an inadequate though desperate bid, for her child's favor. Impossible to compete with Janeway, who, aside from his money, had many a potent personal charm for a lively child. Most tragic of all was the certainty that Janeway, released from the restraint of her presence, now brought his intrigues into the house that sheltered his little daughter.

Less than two years after Ruth's dismissal—I could not help thinking of her as resembling a forlorn and friendless little maid whose master, unable to bend her to his will, has dismissed "without a character" from his employ—it was announced that Richard Janeway was to remarry. The woman was the same unscrupulous creature who had shamelessly intruded upon the honeymoon of an innocent girl, the very last person in the world to whom one would willingly entrust a child. Reversing the Bible story, what true mother would not have had the judge's sword cleave her child in twain rather than hand her over to such a foster-parent?

I was much upset and even considered appealing to Mrs. Janeway. I longed to offer Ruth some assurance, but she was calm and cold, and very pale; she would not let me speak about the approaching marriage. She showed no trace of an unbearable anxiety, however, so I was forced to decide she had some inner spring of security. Perhaps, after all, Janeway would wish to disembarrass himself of Camilla. Perhaps his mother would take charge of her, make some arrangements more humanely considerate of the mother.

Something of all this ran through my mind when I received that mysterious telephone message one night less than a week before the date set for the Janeway-Graydon wedding. It was early in the evening, not eight o'clock. I had just come in, cold and covered with snow, and it was with some impatience that I answered the call, fearing another summons.

It was a woman's voice, as I have said, soft and very quick. After the speaker had given her message and, summarily, rung off, I marveled that I had caught every word so readily, for she had spoken at lightning speed, and the storm made transmission difficult.

"Dr. Hillyer?" she had questioned.

"Yes," was my reply.

"Come at once to Richard Janeway's," she resumed. "At once. He has been badly hurt. Bring whatever is necessary. You will find the front door open."

Though I demanded the name of the speaker and the nature of the injury, and called out, "Hello!" again and again, there was no further reply. I could have sworn, however, that the young woman—there was that about the timbre of her voice, faintly as I heard it, that convinced me that she was young—had not hung up her receiver. I even had an indefinite mental picture of Camilla's nurse before me as I dressed again for the street—the Janeway house was around the corner—and looked up my emergency bag, because I remembered her as not only young but refined and attractive. She was the only member of the household who could have spoken the message.

I am peculiarly responsive to and retentive of voices, tunes, faces, odors. After two decades, and on the other side of the world, a passing fragrance, a snatch of song, the tone of a laugh will take me back questing, questing. And I am never satisfied till I have recalled and identified the previous experience. Now, however, preoccupied as I was and knowing that I had heard the young nurse speak on several occasions, the very vague suggestion of familiarity in the faint and hurried tones of the unnamed speaker did not lead me for the moment any further afield.

In less than ten minutes, I was at Richard Janeway's steps, for we both lived in the same big city block of narrow-fronted, four-storied brick and brownstone houses, ideal of an earlier generation. When I turned the corner, I recall, there were a number of automobiles swishing along at a good rate in the thick, swirling snow which melted into slush as it fell, for it was the opera season, and close upon the

hour. There was no pedestrian in sight in the long street. People did not go out afoot much in that district, in the evening, particularly.

The steps of Richard Janeway's house showed a double track of small footprints, already blurred in a thin layer of wet snow, one coming out, I decided, the other returning. My mysterious message-bearer, no doubt, running out to a neighbor's for help, or, perhaps, to the druggist's two streets below. I ran quickly up the broad steps.

Both doors were partly open, as if the wind had pushed them in; and this fact, together with the wet snow that had blown into the vestibule, conveyed a momentary impression of desolation and neglect, though the wide, dim hall with its sumptuous Turkish rugs, Jacobean chest, and gold-framed mirrors was as magnificently imposing as ever.

I rang and stood for a second stamping my feet, expecting momentarily to see some one issue from the softly lighted library at the back of the hall—Richard Janeway's stronghold. The mere fact that he was at home and the big black-oak desk-chair untenanted—I could see the chair from where I stood, together with a bit of color from the open fire—argued unusual things. I could also see a corner of the massive, highly polished table-desk. On that corner stood the telephone from which I had just been summoned so peremptorily.

No one moved or spoke.

I pushed in impatiently, looked about me, and listened. The house was breathlessly silent, and, as it seemed to me, expectant.

Closing the inner door behind me, I threw my ulster and hat on the carved chest and kicked off my arctics. Then, catching up my bag again, I strode confidently down the long hall and entered the inviting, cozy-looking library.

Here, too, silence and emptiness; though everything was disposed as if several persons had but just quitted the warm fireside—paper and an inky pen laid out, the *Evening Transcript* scattered on desk and floor, a couple of chairs at a careless angle. As I stood there, puzzled, undecided, the aroma of a fine cigarette touched my nostrils. An Argyrolopos, half-smoked, still sent up a thin spiral of smoke from a bronze receptacle on the table. I knew those monogrammed cigarettes of Richard Janeway's. The cork tip was still sodden from the imprint of his lips.

My eye fell again on the telephone. The receiver was lying on the blotter, at the full length of its short green cord. I had been correct, then; my informant had not waited to hang up. Mechanically, I picked up the instrument and readjusted it. The act seemed in some fashion to reassure me, by putting me, as it were, in touch with the rest of the world.

The telephone bell whirred violently.

I had already turned away, toward the servant's bell-cord hanging against the paneled wall, but I leaped back to the telephone. Perhaps my mysterious summoner, obliged to leave the house for the moment, might now call up to give me further instructions. Perhaps she had been calling for some time.

I caught up the receiver and called out eagerly, loudly: "Hello!"

A hearty woman's voice responded immediately. "Richard? Who've you been talking to the last quarter of an hour, more or less? I've been asking and asking, and all I could get was: 'The line is busy!'—Listen, Richard!" The speaker checked her flood of words.

Recognizing the voice, I spoke out with assurance: "Mrs. Janeway?"

There was a dumb sort of pause, as if the speaker were surprised and puzzled. Then the full, throaty voice came again; I could actually see the frown of impatience on Richard's mother's broad, rosy face.

"Is this Richard Janeway's house?" she demanded.

"It is."

"Who are you?"

"Your good friend, Caspar Hillyer."

"Oh! Dr. Hillyer! Is Richard ill?" Alarm and passionate devotion spoke in every accent.

"I have reason to think he is, Mrs. Janeway."

"What do you mean?" she cried.

"I've just received an emergency call to his house and—I find no one here to receive me."

She drew a long, gasping breath. "Richard called you?"

"No. One of the maids, I imagine. But—"

"A woman's voice. How long ago?" One would have said the attorney for the prosecution.

I consulted my watch. "Eighteen minutes—twenty, perhaps."

"The maids have all been out since half-past seven. No one was in the house but Richard and Camilla."

"It wasn't Camilla."

"Isn't she there?"

"Not down-stairs, at any rate. It must be after her bedtime."

"I don't understand it. You haven't —seen Richard?" "Seen" was the word she used, but I understood that she meant "found." She was ever an indomitable woman. Besides, the mother of a man like Richard Janeway, be she ever so tolerant, must feel, from the day he attains maturity, that there are many things that may happen to him—sins that may find him out. She must be, in some sense, prepared.

I replied as reassuringly as I could. "I've not yet had a chance to look. He's not in the library, though he's evidently been here within the half hour."

"You've not been up-stairs—to his bedroom?"

"I was just about to go. Are you alone, Mrs. Janeway?"

"I am not alone. But I will be right over."

I hesitated a moment. "I wonder—may I ask—"

She replied instantly. "Ruth is here. Ruth Janeway."

Ruth Janeway!

II.

THE moment I heard Ruth's name, the voice of the mysterious message-bearer rang again in my ears. "Come at once to Richard Janeway's. At once." That teasing suggestion of familiarity! My ears drummed and my steady hand trembled. "What horrible hallucination was this?" I asked myself impatiently. To hear a word or two over the telephone, lightning-swift, muffled by the storm, and then imagine— Fortunately, I was not called upon to speak at once, for, confused and horror-stricken, I don't know what I should have managed to say. I fought to thrust the mad idea from me, but it persisted.

Muted by madam's prudent hand over the transmitter, the sound of excited voices came to me faintly. There was a passionate, pleading voice, and an arbitrarily refusing one—madam's. The pleading voice gathered strength and insistence; it seemed to beat down madam's voice, for all its peremptory refusal.

Suddenly madam resumed speech with me. The whole argument, with its crowding words, had consumed only a few minutes.

"Ruth insists on coming with me," she declared. "Insist" was a new word as between Ruth and her former mother-in-law. "I have sent her to order the car; you can't expect an old woman to go afoot a night like this, even this short distance. So I can speak freely. She seems terribly alarmed lest Camilla wake and come down-stairs. Just from my conversation with you she's managed to hit upon the whole story. She's convinced something terrible has happened."

I was torn by warring impulses: desire to see Ruth; hope that the sight of her would forever reassure me; fear that, guilty, she might say or do something to draw upon her the terrible suspicion of her mother-in-law; eagerness to stand between them; calculation that her mere presence here, under Mrs. Janeway's wing, as it were, might appear proof positive that she was innocent; knowledge that, if she were innocent, and placed exactly as she was now, the thought of her child would be paramount. My mind rushed wildly hither and yon, foreseeing complications, warding off dangers, piecing together, tearing apart. In the space of a few seconds, the whole drama had played itself out for me to a dozen anguished conclusions.

I spoke stumblingly. "How is Ruth? Do you see her often?"

"Seldom. She seems about as usual—pale, calm, cold. These cold women. You

can never tell what they are thinking of!" The ejaculation was an accusation for Ruth, an extenuation for Janeway. "She came to try to get me to interfere with Richard's marriage, or, at least, with his guardianship of Camilla. Fancy! As if the child wasn't as devoted to him as he is to her!"

"You refused?"

"She wouldn't let me refuse. I had to consent to call Richard and make suggestions. No use to tell her the line was busy. I don't think she quite believed me. She kept me calling till I was hoarse. Here she is, now, with my wraps. We'll be right over. Will you let us in?"

I was about to reply, in the words of my mysterious informant: "You will find the front door open." But I changed my mind. I had a fancy to make my search alone.

"Ring," I directed her. "I will answer. If I do not come at once, wait. I may be up-stairs." If they arrived too soon, I could keep them waiting a little.

Though madam spoke again, I hung up resolutely. In another minute, crushing down the confusedly whirling surmises that filled my brain, I had made a rapid circuit of the big rooms on the first floor, turning on the lights as I went. Everywhere, the richness and perfect order of opulent, well-ordered bachelor quarters, that ready-made, impersonal sort of order which bespeaks a house without a mistress. Everywhere, silence, too, and emptiness. No sign of any one, sick or well.

Thoroughly at home with the plan of the house, I swung to the stairs, snapping the electric button at the foot, to light the upper hall. The shaded light poured down the beautiful winding staircase—one of those white colonial masterpieces that curve a complete semicircle in a comparatively narrow space. My hand on the gleaming mahogany rail, I stamped up the sharply rising treads, with their thick, sound-stifling carpet.

Just opposite the landing, the door of Richard Janeway's spacious bedroom stood open. The broad four-poster stretched its smooth white coverlet in the light which the street arcs poured in the long front windows.

I pressed the electric buttons and looked about. Absolute order and emptiness as before. His bath-room? I crossed the room quickly. Nothing there.

I stood a moment frowning. Could I, after all, have been mistaken? No, the call was real enough; the telephone records, I was sure, would bear me out there. Besides, there was the front door staring wide; the library with its fire and light and signs of recent occupancy in the apparently empty house; the telephone receiver sprawling upon the tiny blotter. Some woman had been here, some woman, perhaps out of a long past; had wrought her will, her vengeance, possibly; had hurriedly summoned aid with a woman's illogical regret, and left in frantic haste.

I now faced the head of the bed. What was wrong about it? The pillows had been removed. The embroidered shams lay crumpled on the counterpane against the headboard.

This first *sign*—a significant one in so well-ordered an establishment—stirred me inexplicably. Those scalloped, monogrammed squares of fine linen, in themselves so unimportant, so superfluous—My hand shook a little when I picked up one of them. There was a tiny stain, still reddish, on one corner.

At sight of that red mark, my self-possession returned completely. I was on my own ground at last and knew with what I had to deal. An injured man—a wounded man—

Hurriedly, I ransacked the deep closet, squatted down to look under the bed, pulled aside the heavy hangings, until I had satisfied myself that there was no one—alive or dead—in the room. On the bureau, I noted a charming picture of Ruth and Camilla; on the mantel, a flamboyant photograph of the future mistress of the house.

The other bedrooms on this floor? I knew they were, as a usual thing, untenanted, and, before examining them, I meant to visit Camilla's nursery on the third floor. I crossed quickly to the hall door by which I had entered, my eager eyes outstripping my feet and straining ahead toward the upper stairway.

From the very doorway, dangling about two steps from the bottom, a man's foot was visible, silk-stockinged, shod in a fine, dull-finished black pump.

I advanced without pause or tremor, my eyes on the broad, high-arched foot, the well-turned, muscular ankle. No need to ask whose ankle it was.

As I reached the stair and began to climb, the leg, sturdy, of good length, clad in expensive broadcloth, came into view round the opening curve of the stairway. Then another leg, carelessly folded under. Then, as my vista extended, the torso, deep-chested, broad-shouldered, with its plastron of conventional white. Finally, half-way up, propped by white pillows which showed a still widening stain, the handsome head of Richard Janeway. On his face, unmarked by the dark stream that soaked one side of his heavy, fair hair, an expression of surpassing astonishment. The eyes were wide-open, fixed.

A glance, a touch told me he had been dead nearly half an hour. His own pet revolver lay several steps above his head, beyond his reach. I picked it up carefully, for I am no friend of loaded firearms, and ascertained that one chamber was empty. Without a moment's hesitation, I replaced it, with studied carelessness, close to his right hand.

Scarcely had I done so, when I heard the front-door bell ring out its peremptory summons. Madam's hand on the button, I was convinced.

Instead of answering at once, I ran on up the stairs, lighted the third floor hallway, pushed back the heavy door that cut the hall in two, and so to the secluded back room, the wide, sunny nursery, dedicated to little Camilla Janeway. I did not hesitate to push in the door gently, for I knew the little girl was a sound, hearty sleeper—she had not evidently, wakened to the shot on the stairs below. As to the neighbors, in this vicinity, and on this main traveled thoroughfare, with the incessant passage of machines and occasional blow-outs, a muffled explosion more or less was of small moment. If no outcry followed, no investigation would be made.

The shaded night-light disclosed a small figure curled up with kittenlike coziness against the searching air from the wide-open, hygienically curtainless window. The down puff rose and fell with the child's regular breathing. Even as I looked, she stirred a bit and murmured.

Reassured, I drew back quickly and closed the door. If she must be wakened, she should see first the face of her nurse or grandmother. With her mother's face, alas! she was not so intimately familiar.

Cutting down, as quickly as I could, by the back stairs, I floundered a minute in some dim region on the first floor, then made my way into the still lighted and expectant library, and so, almost breaking into a trot, to the front door; for madam's ring had been several times repeated, and I could hear her voice raised excitedly.

The two women stood in the wind-swept vestibule, the elder luxuriously smothered in furs, the younger appearing by contrast doubly slim and fragile in her inadequate-looking cheap suit. Mrs. Janeway was stricken but indomitable. About Ruth, in spite of—or rather *under*—the pretty expression of anxiety she wore, there was a strange hint of appeasement—consummation. She made me think fleetingly of a child who wrinkles up his smooth brow out of deference to your grown-up trouble, but is conscious of the illimitable joys of childhood all the same. She seemed to be fighting down a vague, delicious smile. She looked younger, too, than I had ever seen her look, and lovelier. She was like a pearl of price beside a flawed and gaudy jewel. Her brown eyes met mine searching steadily; her oval cheek was softly flushed as with joyous impatience and anticipation. Appalled at her aspect, I stared speechlessly, till, from her mangy-looking muff, she offered me a small, ungloved hand, cold as ice.

"Come into the library," I managed, at length.

I placed chairs with a dismal sort of ceremony. Ruth's eyes, I could not but notice, ran around the room alertly, while Mrs. Janeway, loosening her magnificent fur wrap, seated herself with steely calm, never once releasing me from her piercing scrutiny.

"We are too late to do anything, I see," she said at last, evenly.

I nodded.

"Oh!" cried Ruth, her eyes widening incredulously, her bright color fading. "*Are you sure?*"

"Absolutely."

Ruth leaned forward breathlessly, searching my face. Her expression of bright security fell from her like a mask. Her mouth rounded into another horrified and wordless "Oh," and she looked like one drowning. After a moment, she began to tremble violently.

I tried to watch her without seeming to, for I was afraid she would faint, thankful, meanwhile, that she was not in madam's direct line of vision. I endeavored to appear to offer all my attention to Richard's mother, who, grimly upright, stared at me challengingly.

"It's all over with Richard, then?" she demanded, sharply.

"All over, Mrs. Janeway. We must decide what we are to do—whether there is any more—seemly explanation we can frame, for Camilla's sake."

Richard Janeway's mother dropped her eyes and nodded her head quietly, several times. I could see a tear glistening at the corner of her eyelid.

Suddenly Ruth faltered into speech again.

"Camilla?" she whispered.

I tried to smile at her reassuringly.

"Camilla is safely asleep in her bed," I replied.

At once, I turned again to Mrs. Janeway, trying to hold her attention.

"Tell me about it," she said, softly.

"Richard was shot in the head, Mrs. Janeway. Death must have been almost instantaneous. He could scarcely have suffered. There was a revolver beside him. The one he used to keep here, in his desk."

Mrs. Janeway started, then, and stared, incredulously. "His own revolver? Open that upper right-hand drawer."

I obeyed. The drawer was empty. She could see it was empty from where she sat.

"He always kept it there," she said. "And it was always loaded, though I never knew him to use it." Then, after a long breath: "Can we make it appear that the house was broken into? I dread an investigation." She put up her clenched hand to her cheek. "They dig up such horrible things—everything a man ever did or said or thought, even."

"Possibly," I returned. "He might be supposed to have been giving chase to an intruder. The position of his body would bear out that theory. The empty house, too, the open door—"

"You found him—"

"Half way up the second stairway."

"On the stairway!" A shudder passed over her erect figure. For the second time that night, she murmured: "I don't understand it." Then briskly: "What time is it, Caspar?"

I told her.

"We have half an hour before the maids return. We must make up our minds as to what has happened, and decide what we are to do."

I stole a glance at Ruth. She had herself well in hand by this time, and looked as if, having weathered a terrible moment of readjustment, she had achieved a shining sort of self-vindication. It was clear to me that, whatever had transpired, she had not, with malice aforethought, been the cause of Richard Janeway's death. Would that fact save her, however, from a whole volume of horrors?

III.

MEANWHILE madam went on with businesslike directness, narrowing her frost-blue eyes. "As to this mysterious informant, now. Would you recognize her voice if you heard it again, Caspar?"

"I—I— She said so little, and spoke so rapidly—" I shrugged my shoulders, helplessly.

Madam's eyes sought another of those flamboyant photographs on the desk. "Do you know Lucia's voice?" she brought out, sharply.

"Oh, yes."

"Did it— Was it—"

I checked the denial that sprang to my lips. "I really haven't a thing to go on, Mrs. Janeway. It might have been yourself for all I know. The connection was very poor."

"Well, I can't imagine any motive for that. Lucia was only too well pleased with Richard, and he'd been behaving beautifully. She was really the one woman for him. I've always said so. And she was very fond of Camilla."

While madam was agitating this question of voices, I thought I marked a passing tremor of Ruth's left hand in its discolored and crumpled tan glove, as it lay along the arm of her big chair. Her right hand, bare, I remembered, when she came in, was buried now in her moth-eaten brown muff. When madam dropped the topic, she put up the little bare hand, roughened and reddened from the cold, opened her thin, skimpy coat, and turned it back to show a soft, white blouse, a garment distinctly unsuited to the season. Above it her slim neck rose, white and fresh as a child's. Poor girl I thought. She must have lost the mate to that rain-stiffened, mended glove. Even such a loss was of sinister importance to her slender exchequer. I must send her a fresh pair on some pretended anniversary.

Madam continued, still mistress of the situation. "Suicide is out of the question. Absolutely. Richard loved life."

I nodded, half my faculties attending as closely as possible to her suggestions, the other half straining ahead, striving to capture some safe, plausible, and diverting explanation of my own. My invention seemed barren, however.

"Besides, there was the woman." Madam's face lighted suddenly. "Suppose we think of Richard as pursuing some one, armed. Some one—" The grim old mouth tightened. "Some *woman* who wished to strike at Richard through Camilla; they were on the second flight, you see. There are several women who might wish to do that, I must admit. Richard, perhaps, caught her on the stairs, intending solely to threaten. She clutched his revolver insanely, as women will. In the struggle—" She threw out both hands with a gesture of finality. "Then, the damage irrevocably done, she weakened, and called for help." She leaned toward me urgently. "She knew *you*, too, Caspar."

"My name and number are on the first page of Richard's emergency desk-list," I put in, hastily.

Was madam building better than she knew? In my mind's eye, I could see Ruth seeking an interview with her former husband; could see her making her forlorn and desperate plea in Camilla's behalf, and his contemptuous and laughingly cynical refusal. Could she have made a mad attempt to seize the child? But where, alas! could have fled with Richard Janeway's daughter, a penniless little stray like Ruth? She was too clear-headed, too well aware of her utter helplessness to have made any such senseless move.

Besides, Richard Janeway would never have pursued a woman with a revolver in his hand. He had no need of weapons. Ruth's fragile strength against his formidable figure— The revolver must have been in the intruder's hand—in Ruth's hand. She knew its hiding place. But why the flight toward the third story—and the sleeping Camilla?

All at once the old Bible tale recurred to me: Solomon deciding between the two women who claimed the same child, and offering to cleave it in twain, that they might have each a share, and be satisfied. "Give her the living child, my lord," the true mother answered. "And in nowise slay it." This modern mother, impotent to decide the future of her child, would she passively acquiesce: "Give it to *her*, my lord"—to *that other woman!* Or would she, driven beyond endurance, take the sword in her own hand?

Meanwhile, like an advocate, the stern old woman went on. "Some one who knew Camilla's whereabouts, who knew the servants were to be away. Just what time did you say you had the telephone message, Caspar?"

"Quarter to eight—thirteen, possibly twelves minutes before the hour. I did not look at my watch, but I know that when I came in—"

"A quarter to eight." Mrs. Janeway turned a vague glance in Ruth's direction. "And *you* were ringing my bell at the hour, Ruth. And it was all over with Richard then. I remember because—"

She stopped short, and her sweeping

glance returned to Ruth, as if seeing her for the first time, though still, because of her insignificance in the present crisis, a little out of focus. For just an instant, I could see she casually considered Ruth. Ruth met the passing, merciless scrutiny with her wide-eyed gaze. I wished passionately she would not look quite so serene, so almost joyous, as if she had met adequately the big issue of her life. Madam might well take fire at her serenity.

"Perhaps it's just as well you were with me at that juncture, young lady," she remarked dryly, looking away again, with a slight shrug. "It may save lots of awkward suspicions." Yet, if any one had hinted that Ruth could have constituted a danger for her son, she would have laughed, derisively.

"Now as to the operator's continued statement that the line was busy, Caspar. How do you explain that? Could any one have been here and telephoning at the very moment you approached the steps?"

Unreasoningly, I yielded to her insistence. "I can explain that, Mrs. Janeway. The line was not busy. When I entered this room, the receiver was lying on the desk." I was not half way through this admission before I questioned its wisdom. But it was too late to stop.

"Ah! The woman dropped it in her haste to get away," was madam's comment. "Lost her nerve, I suppose." Her eyes returned to Ruth speculatively. "A quarter to eight. They will say you had time to get to my house after all, my dear," she remarked, tantalizingly, though, I could see, definite suspicion was still far from her thoughts.

Perhaps she took this tune to hearten herself, for it always put her in a glow to make people squirm and shake; she could never keep her maids for this reason. Or perhaps Ruth's serenity had at last infuriated her. But Ruth Janeway neither shook nor squirmed. She just smiled back at madam with a queer, bright sort of expectation, for all the world like a lively child who waits for a plodding elder to make his final guess in a stirring game. I would have given everything I possessed for ten minutes alone with her, but, with my attention divided as it was, I could not, for the life of me, devise a pretext for breaking the circle about the fire.

That fire, I now perceived, had fallen low, and I started forward at madam's command: "Stir up that fire, Caspar. I hate a slow fire."

But before I could rise, Ruth, who was nearest the grate, slipped forward to one knee and grasped the heavy tongs capably in her little hand. "Let me," she offered. Then she threw on a fresh log.

IV.

MADAM'S attention suddenly swerved. "Still bare-handed, Ruth. You didn't find that glove you thought you dropped at my house? It's my belief you lost it before you got there. Your hand was icy when I touched it."

"Perhaps you are right," Ruth replied, evenly, from the hearth. The flaring firelight lit up her bright brown eyes, the soft waves of fair hair about her low forehead.

Suddenly I recalled Ruth's anxious glances on entering the room. Had she been looking for that glove? Could she have dropped it here? I looked about hastily — the floor, the chairs, the desk. My eye lingered on the blotter. It was uneven, and showed a hump at one end. I stared at it, fascinated. I could not take my eyes away from it, nor could I for the moment devise any pretext for removing madam from the room.

And presently she rose, ponderously, lorgnon in hand, like a lance at rest. "I want a look about," she announced. "They say a criminal always leaves some trace. Oh, invariably. Of course, there'll be finger-prints. The police, if the thing goes that far, will see to those." Relentlessly, she bore down upon the desk. She tapped the mouthpiece of the telephone with her gold-handled eye-glass. "*Your* finger-marks will appear on this, Caspar, in bad company. But I wonder if we can't find something else — something that would speak to *us*." She tugged at the edges of the broad, bronze-bound blotter, frowning. For the moment, I could scarcely breathe. "This affair is crooked—and lumpy. Rich-

ard wouldn't have stood it so; he was extremely exact. There's something limp and sticky under this corner. Oh, it's scratching the table—Richard's favorite table." There was a shrill squeak as of metal on wood.

Hastily removing the pressure of her hands, she lifted the edge of the green blotter. Underneath, flattened out like an open hand, lay a tiny, much defaced and discolored tan glove, still soggy with wet, crumpled, threadbare, palm down on the costly table. Its metallic clasps had cut a zigzag scratch into the polished surface.

We all three caught sight of the glove at the same instant. We stared at it in silence. Madam even put up her lorgnon to make sure. There could be no possible question as to its ownership—as to how and when it had come there.

In a storm of rage, Richard Janeway's loyal mother wheeled upon his discredited young wife. "*You!*" she cried, purple, inarticulate with rage. "*You—you!*"

Ruth Janeway stepped forward quickly and, before the older woman could interfere, picked up the glove. Then, bending over it rosily, she smoothed out the pathetic bit of dogskin and drew it over her chapped hand.

Madam gasped. "You—you admit the glove's yours?" she cried. "You've been in this house before, to-night?"

"Yes, it's my glove. I must buy a new pair the end of the week, when I get paid. Just now these are all I have. I hope you won't mind. If you want it, I promise to produce it."

I advanced and held out my hands protestingly. "Ruth!"

She gave me both hands and smiled. "No, doctor. It's better to tell what I know. I can see now it's the only way. Then you can decide what to do. Perhaps it's not as bad as you think."

Like a fury Mrs. Janeway sprang toward the girl and clutched her savagely by the shoulder. "You killed Richard? You came here to kill him? You knew he was alone in the house?"

Ruth, raising steady eyes, shook her head vigorously. "I knew nothing about who was in the house. I came here to beg him to give me some assurance about Camilla—to leave her with you, not to put her into that woman's hands. Somehow I felt sure I could make him listen to me this time, though he never had before." She broke off and wrung her hands. "And when he wouldn't listen—why it was more than I could bear."

Madam spoke up in arrogant defense of her son. "As if he was capable of harming his own child! Camilla was the light of his eyes."

Ruth seemed to tower inches above her taller opponent. Her small body was tense, her eyes blazing. "*You* wouldn't call it harming her, perhaps!" she cried. "All you'd ask was that she'd be good-looking, and a success. You wouldn't care a pin what she did or was!"

Mrs. Janeway drew back a bit. "I shouldn't make a point of teaching her psalm tunes, I grant you," she remarked, ironically. "We are not a psalm-singing family. Camilla herself—"

Ruth actually silenced her mother-in-law with an imperious gesture. "Oh, I know all about Camilla. She is like Richard. She would grow up just exactly like him, under his care. But she is my child. I am responsible for her, even if your courts did give her to Richard. Do you think it would be right for me to stand by, knowing what I know—I tell you I couldn't do it! It would be criminal. If you were like any other mother, you would understand." She threw out both her eloquent little hands violently. "Richard used to bring her in to his dinner parties, and give her sips of things to drink, and have her stand on a chair and sing. You know he did. And she liked it. It was just exactly what she liked!"

"The idea!" shrugged madam, contemptuously. "Making such a fuss over a little fun like that! And Camilla such a baby!" Her crest was perceptibly lower just the same.

"She was not such a baby!" Ruth's voice rose, ringingly. "Can't you remember when Richard was eight or nine, and had no father to control him, and his mother didn't want to control him? I've heard about Richard's—*babyhood!*"

Madam looked away for a moment, biting her lip.

I seized the opportunity to urge the two women to their chairs. "Let us have it out quietly, and quickly," I begged. "We are wasting our time."

Madam sank into her chair with a sudden sigh of weariness. Ruth, like a bird ready for flight, perched on the high settle opposite. Her little feet were drawn under, and crossed, so that she appeared to be poised on tiptoe. Her cheeks were like pink fire.

I hastened to seize the questioner's rôle. "And when Richard refused to listen to you, Ruth?"

"Richard laughed at me, though I said things to him you'd think no father could resist. Laughed and laughed at me, as if I were some kind of a helpless idiot. Something seemed to happen to me, then: I could see the red firelight all over the room, whichever way I looked, and there was a humming in my ears. I felt all confused —strong, though, and furiously angry, as I had never felt before. I had to clench my teeth to keep from screaming. Then, all at once, things got very clear, and I saw just what I must do. I felt calm again, and perfectly confident; not really angry any more, though Richard tried to dismiss me as if I had been a servant.

"He said I was as ineffectual as ever—that I'd never be able to make my point, at anything. He said Camilla was going to be a handful, and I'd never be able to manage her. I was too tame. And she was all Janeway. He told me to come back some time, with another plea, when I had a little more—*ginger!*" Ruth brought out the insulting slang word defiantly, blushing to her ears. "Then, when I still didn't go, he said I had him at a disadvantage; he couldn't ring to have me shown out, as one did with superfluous and importunate visitors, because there wasn't a servant in the house.

"I just sat there looking and looking at him, and wishing I were a man, and as big and strong as he. If I had had the revolver then, I might have shot him, though that was not what I had made up my mind to do. But it was still in the desk, at his right hand. And anyway I was afraid of Richard. I knew he'd get the best of me somehow; he always did. He was so big and rich and fortunate, and always did just what he pleased. I couldn't be sure of killing Richard. And if I tried and failed, he'd put me away where I could not save Camilla. No, I wouldn't dare to try to kill Richard, but I was sure I could manage with Camilla."

"*Camilla!*"

"Yes. She would be asleep, and she would never know. Then I could kill myself, too, if I had time before Richard caught up with me. If not—well, it wouldn't matter what happened to me, after Camilla was safe. And Richard could marry whom he pleased."

For a moment, we couldn't speak. I myself could scarcely breathe, and things looked blurred before my starting eyes.

Madam recovered first, though her carefully massaged and powdered face was ashen. Her voice came weakly, gaspingly, as if she had been running a race. Her lips were so dry she had to run her tongue over them.

"You!" she whispered incredulously. "*Ruth!* Your own child!" Then she leaned back and covered her eyes with her hands.

I put my hand gently on Ruth's arm.

"Go on, my dear," I urged. "Go on quickly." That black figure on the upper stairway, silent and waiting, was always before my eyes.

Ruth turned her eyes to me a bit vaguely.

"Where was I?" she asked.

"You were sitting here, opposite Richard, and he—"

"Oh, yes. He paid no further attention to me; I might have been a—beggar. He took up pen and paper, and settled himself to write. He couldn't seem to begin, however; he kept looking up at me, and frowning. I just sat there and waited."

"What were you waiting for, my dear?"

"I knew if he got a bit on edge, he'd go into the dining-room pretty soon, to the sideboard, and get a drink. Then I could open the drawer. And he did, after a few minutes. He threw down his pen and pushed back his chair. 'How do you ex-

pect me to write with you sitting there like a fantom at a feast? Since you won't oblige me by going, I see I'll have to go myself.' So he got up and stamped into the dining-room.

"I was at the drawer in a second. It opened easily. I snatched up the revolver. It was heavier than I expected and I almost dropped it. I didn't stop to close the drawer, then; I just flew into the hall and up the stairs.

"As I was leaving the library, I called out: 'I won't trouble you any longer, Richard.' Perhaps my voice didn't sound right; perhaps he heard me on the stairs. I didn't dare light the hall light, and I stumbled a couple of times. Besides, I should have opened and closed the front door, as if I had gone out. I thought of that afterward, when I heard him coming.

"I was just beginning the second flight when I heard him. He came up—tearing. Like a mad bull. You could feel the house shake. He had seen the empty drawer, of course. It didn't take him a second to catch me—not a second. I had only gone a few steps. He got hold of my hand in a terrible grip, but I clung to the revolver just as tight as I could. I was bound I wouldn't give in to him this time, though I'm sure I don't know what I intended to do. We swayed back and forth a minute. I thought surely we'd both fall down the stairs. Then the thing went off. It was deafening. And Richard sort of crumpled up and sat down. After a second, he leaned back—flat on the stairs, and breathed heavy and fast.

"I stood listening, expecting some one to raise an alarm. The revolver was still in my hand. Then, as there wasn't a sound, I started, without thinking at all, I was so dazed, up toward Camilla's room again. I didn't even realize that there might be no need, now—"

"*Ruth!*" gasped Mrs. Janeway.

"But Richard realized. He managed to call me back.

"I stopped and looked round at him, as if I had been sleep-walking.

"'You won't need to do that, now,' he said. And his voice wasn't so very weak, either. 'You can have Camilla.'"

("Give *her* the living child, my lord, and in no wise slay it." Richard, then, had played the part of the Hebrew mother, and Ruth, in some terrible fashion, that of the judge. I could imagine her standing there on the stairs, with the smoking revolver in her hand.)

"I flew back to Richard at that," Ruth continued, swiftly. "'You won't interfere?' I cried. I thought then that he wasn't much hurt—that he'd had his lesson. 'You give me your word of honor?'

"He looked me right in the eye. 'My word of honor,' he repeated, with a grim sort of smile. 'I won't ever interfere again. You can have it all your own way after this.' And he kept on looking at me, as if he'd never seen me before. 'I didn't think you had it in you, Ruth,' he went on. 'You were always so damned *tame*. Perhaps you can handle Camilla after all.' He didn't seem to despise me any longer. Then his mouth quirked up again. 'She'll keep you busy. Go as light on her as you can.' He tried to put his hand to his head. 'Get me a pillow,' he said.

"I dropped the revolver somehow and flew down into our old room. Then I propped him up with the pillows. I asked him if I'd telephone a doctor, and he said yes, Dr. Hillyer; *you'd* take care of him all right. He looked at my hands, then. 'You've kept your gloves on,' he said. 'That's right.' And I saw what he meant in a minute.

"'You must cut along, though,' he said. 'You mustn't be mixed up with this, not if you're going to do all these things for—Camilla. Promise you'll cut along.'

"I said I didn't think I could leave him like that, but he simply made me go. You know what Richard was. He pulled himself up on his elbow a little and asked me if I wanted him to throw me out, and how I thought I could explain my presence there. Even in the dusk I could see he was getting weaker, and I didn't dare excite him. Besides, he kept saying: 'I'll be all right. Nothing can happen to me now.' And I really thought he meant it—that way. 'Give it out as an accident,' he said. 'Cleaning my gun, you know. That sort of thing. Happens every day. They can

put me on the bed. And you clear out of here. Camilla—'

"He repeated her name several times, but he never got any further. I thought, of course, he was merely faint, because he seemed so strong and talked so well. So I raced down and called *you*." She smiled at me, vaguely.

"And you answered right away. I closed the desk drawer then, I remember. And I took off my right glove to fix my hair and veil a bit at the mirror. I knew I mustn't go out looking too wild and disheveled. So you see, I didn't touch anything with my bare hands; I was safe that far. Even when I heard a queer noise somewhere in the house and started back and stumbled over the rug, I managed to steady myself by leaning on the blotter. I remember the pulpy feeling of it as it slipped off under my bare hand. It must have covered up my glove then, for if the glove had been in sight, I'd have taken it. And I must have jolted the receiver off the hook at the same time. Perhaps I hadn't hung it up quite right."

"You left the house without further thought of Richard?" madam demanded, severely.

Ruth faced her mother-in-law. "I watched from the big elm at the corner below till I saw Dr. Hillyer turn in at his corner. I felt sure then that Richard would be all right. Then I flew to your house."

"Why did you come to me?" madam demanded.

"It flashed on me that you'd be the first one to be called; that, by making a plea for Camilla, I might even be able to get *you* to call Richard's. So I'd hear the earliest news of Richard at your house. I could be certain the doctor would find him all right, though of course he couldn't fail to find him. And Richard, I was sure, would be able to call out."

"You came to me, then, for news?"

"It was the only way I could get news," Ruth returned, defiantly. "I couldn't possibly call up on my own account. Before I reached your steps, I saw that, in every way, coming to you was the best, the safest, the most disarming thing I could do —the most helpful for Richard, since he wouldn't let me stay with him—the only thing for Camilla. Camilla *had* to have me," she ended, challengingly. "I had to save myself for Camilla."

There was silence for a long, long moment—a dreadful, charged silence. The logs in the grate fell apart again and the glow of the fire died down. Madam shivered a little and drew her regal furs close about her tall figure, but she did not speak. She sat motionless, staring into the fire with inscrutable face and widening eyes. I could see she was living a whole decade in these few laden moments, cherishing the past, questioning the future.

Then Ruth went on again, her soft voice gathering force and insistence. Poised on the edge of her bench, she suggested a slim, blond Victory. There was an unlifted, rapt expression on her small, flushed face as she made her final plea.

"I know the whole thing must seem horrible to you—what I thought I must do. It seems horrible to me, too, now; so horrible that I scarcely dare to think of it —though the alternative still seems much worse.

"You may think I was mad. Perhaps I was. But what was I to do? Camilla was mine. I gave her life. For four years I hadn't a thought apart from her. You took her away. I could have borne that. I could have borne your weaning her away from me with your luxuries. But Richard's influence—*that woman!* Why, the moment she came into a room, you felt her, like a poison."

I had a sudden vision of Lucia Deeping —the feline, repulsive grace, the virulent scents, the clinging glance, and still more clinging raiment, the purring, trailing voice. And I shuddered. She might prove the most insidious of poisons; Ruth was right, indeed.

"I *had* to save Camilla from her. Can't you see I had to?" She looked from one of us to the other, challengingly, and there was no one to say her nay. "*Now* I can do for her what she must have done," she resumed, quietly, confidently. "As no one else could do it. It will be hard, but I'm sure I can do it." She threw up her head proudly. "I *have* the force, I *have* the

power; I am *not* ineffectual! I will take only what money we must have to live decently, without having to think always of money. And in ten years I will give you a woman you can be proud of."

Still madam did not speak. Without a quiver or motion, she stared into the dying fire as into a crystal in which all the future was revealed. Time passed. I was minded to fidget with my watch, to cough discreetly, and thus summon her to the gruesome present. We must act decisively before the next hour rang. But something held me back.

A word at the wrong moment might fatally antagonize, for she was an indomitably proud, domineering woman, and she worshiped her son. She had always despised her gentle daughter-in-law, too, and, at the time of Ruth's disgrace, had been one of the first to denounce her. Pitiless when Ruth had been without blame, could she now show mercy? Would she, after this tragic aberration, consider the young mother to be a fitting guardian for her innocent child?

At last, she stirred in her great oak chair. With a sigh that seemed to tear her robust body, she suddenly and with decision, cast off her furred cloak and stripped off her gloves. She rose, and, with a movement of sweeping dignity, turned up her gorgeous velvet skirt and girded it about her massive waist, like an experienced nurse who is about to bathe an infant.

Then she opened her rich lace cuffs and thrust back her flowing sleeves over her muscular forearms. She was grim, terrible, magnificent.

When she spoke, her rough voice was soft as I had never heard it. "Look sharp, Caspar. We'll have to be about it if we are going to move that boy."

LESSONS

BY GRACE G. BOSTWICK

WATERS sing to me. They say,
"Do not be so solemn, pray;
Loosen up and laugh a bit
If you want to make a hit!"

Trees, they murmur in my ear,
"Do not be so fussed, my dear.
Be quiet in your heart, as we,
And you will never anxious be!"

The stones, they whisper, "Let us teach
You patience till your goal you reach;
And when you gain your heart's desire,
You'll find that even stones aspire!"

Have One With Me

by Hayden Talbot and Waldemar Young

THIS is the story of a moderate drinker, partly pieced together from certain things Colonel Compton Gray told us younger bucks one night in Paris and made into more or less mottled mosaic by the two of us who knew Jefferson Lee personally.

We were at college with Lee and in the same class—the famous old class of '04. As newspapermen we followed his brilliant career with more than ordinary interest; and, meeting him now and again, we found him always the same old Jeff, not a whit changed even when the great corporation of which Compton Gray was head contracted for his legal services at the handsome quittance of twenty-five thousand dollars a year.

We knew also Helen Dean, the girl Jeff married; and, up to the time we sailed, a boat or two behind Pershing, to do all that "old lady Anastasie" would let us do as newspaper correspondents, we supposed we knew as much as there was to know of Jefferson Lee's story—a story of success stamped large upon the gray walls of the city, of domestic happiness made marvelously complete by the simple biological formula of "one plus one equals three," the third unit being ten-year-old Jefferson Lee, Jr. It was altogether an admirable story, and typically American.

Colonel Gray did not tell it all. There were things he could not tell, being a soldier and a gentleman. They concerned himself and a woman too closely and too pitiably.

But we picked up fragments here and there, as newspapermen have a way of doing, and analyzed and verified them—as dependable newspapermen always do to the extent of their ability. So we finally got Jefferson Lee's story in its entirety. And we found it to be a story of booze and the evils thereof.

But—

It was not the usual fiction story of booze.

The "poor, besotted victim" did not descend "from a high estate to the gutter," nor did alcohol interfere in one infinitesimal particular with a professional career essentially brilliant.

Here was, instead, a story of the so-called moderate drinker—the man who can "take it or leave it alone"—and who always chooses to take it.

And when the great crisis came in his life, a night in June, 1917—

CHAPTER I.

A "GOOD FELLOW."

THE famous old class of '04 swung through college with a song on its lips. The color of life was red. We all "gave a rouse, then, in the Maytime,

for a life that had no fear "—and most of all Jefferson Lee.

Every Friday night the bunch gathered in the back room of Anzini's roadside saloon, not more than a half-mile from the edge of the campus; and with Jeff's clear barytone leading we sang college songs, seated around a huge table, its pine top a whittled directory of the "real" fellows for twenty years back.

They were not demure ditties. They mostly hymned the praise of good old lager beer. Some of them—late in the evening after several quarts of the brew had been emptied into each yawning stein—ventured farther afield, exploring Rabelaisian pastures with vicarious boldness.

Faculty Row, up on the campus, could hear those songs. The wives of some of the professors fussed around about it, but accomplished nothing.

The faculty was not disposed to interfere. The boys were only letting off steam. Until one night one of the boys stumbled into the wrong house and was mistaken for a burglar and was shot and killed. But that was in a different college generation several years later.

Jefferson Lee was a picturesque figure as he sat in front of the place where he had hacked his name by jack-knife into the soft pine of the table-top—his name and the proud numerals of his class.

"I'm a son of a son of a son of a son of a son of a gambolier,
A son of a son of a son of a son of a son of a gambolier!
Like ev'ry honest fellow, I like my lager beer,
I'm a rambling wreck of poverty, a son of a gambolier!"

His voice rose above them all. His eyes—the eyes of a student with something in them of eternal curiosity, of zest for life—took on unusual brightness. His thick thatch of dark hair was tumbled and tossed back from his forehead. His face was flushed with excitement—and out boomed the song.

Some of us, mid-channel of a semester, not far away from the dangerous shoals of final exams, used to slip down in the middle of the week to Anzini's, or off north from the campus to Louis Braut's, or Jawn O'Keefe's, and there hold modest carousal; but never Jefferson Lee.

He was no fool. He knew why he had come to college. It was only on Friday nights he would put away his "torts" and "contracts" and swing down on his blithesome way to the back room of the roadside saloon.

The result was that Jeff was graduated with higher honors than any of us. Some of us weren't graduated at all.

Helen Dean came for commencement week. Jeff met her at the train. He stepped forward impetuously and seized her hands and would have kissed her—but she turned away from him and introduced him quickly to the man who had preceded her down the steps, a fine-looking, athletic man in the middle thirties.

"Jefferson," she said, "I want you to meet Mr. Gray—Mr. Compton Gray. Of course you've heard of him."

Jefferson Lee and Compton Gray shook hands gravely—and measured one another with their eyes. Of course Jeff had heard of Compton Gray—for his years the most noted alumnus the college ever turned out.

Compton Gray had bucked the line in Wall Street no less successfully than in those other days on the gridiron. He was a big man.

Jefferson was especially attentive to Helen's mother during the ride from the station to the hotel in Bill Hill's rickety old bus. But out of a corner of an eye he noted how close Gray held Helen's interest, as he pointed out familiar landmarks. Finally Helen turned to Jeff.

"Mr. Gray is an old friend of father's," she said. "He tells me he hasn't missed a commencement since his own graduation." She shot a dancing-eyed glance at Gray. "And that was, oh, ever so many years ago!"

"Behold in me the oldest living graduate," Gray laughed, and his gaze went once more to Jeff.

As they neared the campus Compton Gray grew silent. Jeff found himself studying the man between adoring appraisements of Helen's profile.

Here was a big man. At thirty-seven, Compton Gray was, through his own efforts,

a multimillionaire—president of the United Machineries Corporation, a power in the financial world, a national figure! Jeff wondered what might be his own portion in the years to come. Helen would share it surely, come good or ill—or would she—

He turned quickly back to the girl by his side. Was it possible that meanwhile she had been studying him? In any event there was that in her eyes as she turned away that no man ever seeing could mistake. He had his answer.

The bus stopped in front of the president's ivy-covered house at the end of Faculty Row. Compton Gray was to be Prexy's guest during his two-day stay. Before he alighted he asked Helen and her mother if he might take them to the commencement exercises in Heath Memorial Hall.

"I'd be delighted," fluttered Helen.

Gray turned to Jeff. "I understand you are valedictorian. I'll be especially interested to hear your speech."

And as he said this he shot a sidelong glance toward Helen, and there was a merry twinkle in his clear, cold blue eyes.

Later in the day the most distinguished alumnus and the prettiest girl in collegiate annals sat side by side while Jefferson Lee voiced the valedictory for the famous old class of '04.

It was a good speech. There was an unlooked for maturity in what Jeff said; there was positive poise in the manner of his delivery. A very great deal of that directness which later was to win him fame in the courts of the land was already part of his equipment. Most of all, he was sure of himself.

Helen Dean sat as one beholding a vision, her eyes like twin stars. And when the peroration came and was over and Heath Memorial Hall rocked before a tidal wave of applause, Helen welcomed the sudden tears of overwhelming happiness which made a mist in which everything swam before her.

After the crush, Jeff managed to make his way to Gray's side. He had a definite purpose in mind. He would show the elder man there was nothing of petty jealousy in his make-up.

"I have Miss Dean's program for the senior prom to-night," he said as he produced the dance-program from his pocket. "It's been full for a week, but if you like I'll give you three of mine." Gray smiled.

"That's bully of you," he said.

When Jeff told Helen what he had done, her first inquiry was directed to what he should do during those three dances.

"Oh, I'll sit out on the steps with the non-queeners and smoke," he said.

But that is precisely what he did not do. There was a punch-bowl in a bunting-draped alcove.

His eyes took on an unusual brightness. His face was flushed. Only to those of us who knew him well were these weather-signs.

By no one else were they noticed. He was easily the most popular partner of the evening. With easy badinage he danced his way through the evening to the accompanying flutter of more than one feminine heart.

Helen was frankly proud of him. As she was dancing with Compton Gray she asked, "Isn't he splendid?"—and the tone of her voice and the expression in her eyes admitted only one answer. Gray nodded in acquiescence.

"I'm going to keep an eye on him," he said earnestly. "He ought to go far in the law."

They sent Helen's mother to the hotel in a cab, having her permission to walk across the campus the better to see the oncoming sunrise. Helen told Jeff what Compton Gray had said.

"I think it's wonderful," she added, "to attract the attention of a man like Compton Gray."

They were passing old North Hall. As they stepped into a deep shadow Jeff stopped abruptly and gathered her into his arms and crushed her to him almost fiercely. He kissed her again and again—and then abruptly released her!

They finished the walk in silence. His murmured good night was hardly audible as he left her on the porch of the hotel. She stood for a moment watching him stride down the walk.

Then she turned and went to her room,

troubled by a vague doubt — the more troublesome because it was the first doubt.

CHAPTER II.

GOING UP!

ONE year later — June, 1905 — they were married.

On the wings of the morning—March 14, 1907—arrived Jefferson Lee, Jr.

They were wonderfully happy. Their home was a suburban cottage, an hour from Jefferson's office. Except on evenings when he had "business with a client," Jeff was always at home by seven.

Helen did her own housework in order that junior might have the benefit of an expert child's nurse. They couldn't afford two servants.

Jeff was forging ahead—always ahead. His single office had now developed into a suite—of two offices. He had a law clerk now—white-haired, old Nathaniel Stone, himself a one-time counselor-at-law—before the procession swept past him.

Ambition was Jeff's middle name. Since his first case—curiously enough a damage suit against Compton Gray's octopus, the United Machineries Corporation—he had found no lack of clients; but they were chiefly poor folk who could talk only contingent fees.

We thought we were doing Jeff a good turn by giving him large publicity in that first case against the United; but instead we sent to him, like flies to honey, droves of poverty-stricken individuals long on grievances and short on funds. Of course Jeff did win a big proportion of these early cases and thus obtained his fees, and little by little he found opportunities to render legal services for clients with cash of their own.

Yes, Jeff was forging ahead — always ahead.

It was late in 1911 that three really big cases came his way, and they were all against the United Machineries Corporation. He won them one after another, hands down, fighting the best of the United's legal talent. He followed them up and fought them on appeal and won them again!

The day following the handing down of the last of the three decisions by the Appellate Court, Nathaniel Stone stepped into the inner office and coughed three times behind his withered hand. Jeff looked up at the old man quickly. By long experience he had learned that this was always the prefatory notice of good news.

"Yes?" he asked.

"Mr. Compton Gray to speak to you on the phone," said the old law clerk—in a whisper that trembled with combined awe and reverence and unbounded delight.

It was the call Jefferson had been awaiting. But now the moment was at hand he found himself curiously free from the elation he so long had anticipated.

Before he removed the receiver he took a moment to assure himself that his own voice would be steady. Then he dismissed Nathaniel with a curt nod.

"I'd like to have a talk with you," came the oil-smooth voice over the wire.

"Any time you say," replied Jefferson.

"I'll expect you in fifteen minutes," said Compton Gray.

"I'll be there in ten," countered Jeff. As he replaced the receiver he frowned, looking intently at his hand; it was trembling.

Compton Gray was still a young man as men go in Wall Street. At forty-five he still clung to that fine physique and alert vigor that mark the athlete who remains abstemious and rigorously careful of his body.

Yet it was not his appearance that made men—and women—at the same time like and fear this multimillionaire bachelor. It was because all who came in contact with him realized he understood them.

It was the chief factor in his success—understanding individuals. Also, he could figure with exact nicety the relative advantages of fighting or surrendering.

In the case of Jefferson Lee—now that the Appellate Court had sustained all three adverse findings of the lower court—Gray had decided not only to surrender, but to persuade the brilliant young attorney henceforth to fight *for*, instead of against, the United.

Compton Gray's hand did not tremble as

he hung up the receiver at his end of the line. But there was a rather hard little smile playing about his lips.

Sitting beside him was his private secretary, Mary Lawrence, a trim little figure in a plain, blue tailor-made, newly promoted from a stenographership in one of the outer offices. It was the most wonderful thing that had ever happened to her, this advancement, and she was absolutely sure that Compton Gray was the most wonderful man in the world.

"We are about to bring another of the enemy into camp," said Gray, the smile widening.

Mary Lawrence made no comment. Her soft gray eyes were fixed adoringly upon her employer.

"Now, then, to get back to that letter to the Worcester plant," he said bruskly—and abruptly plunged into the dictation at the exact point where he had broken off when news of the court decision had reached him.

The letter was still unfinished when Jefferson's name was brought in to Gray. Ordering the caller to be ushered in at once, Gray dismissed his private secretary in the same breath.

Gray shook Jeff's hand warmly and inquired about his wife and the boy. Then, waving the younger man into a chair, he produced two cigars from a humidor on the desk and handed one to Jeff.

Absentmindedly Jeff examined the cigar. It was big and expensive. About it was a band, a very wide band, on which was embossed Gray's crest.

Gray stated his proposition briefly. His frankness was engaging.

"I have come to the conclusion," he said smilingly, "that it is cheaper to retain you, even if you never try a case for us, than to have you free to fight us. The only matter to be determined is your fee. How much?"

Jeff studied the cigar. He was trying hard to summon courage to ask ten thousand dollars a year!

"How about twenty-five thousand a year?" asked Gray.

Jefferson repeated the figure mechanically, dully. Gray nodded.

Jeff fought hard against an impulse to throw both arms around Gray's neck. He could hardly believe his own ears as he heard himself saying steadily, "That's satisfactory."

Gray rose and put out his hand, as if to seal the pact. Jeff returned the pressure of the hand-clasp, and then took his departure, his mind bordering on chaos.

Down-stairs Jeff hurried to the public pay-station and called Helen. To her, over the phone, he fairly sang the glorious news. She must dress and come into town and dine with him.

Helen had gone to a deal of trouble preparing the dinner Jeff liked best; but she put the little disappointment out of her mind in view of Jefferson's triumph, and agreed enthusiastically to catch the six fifteen to town. They would meet at the Astor.

Jeff hurried back to the building that housed his own offices—the happiest man alive! Out of the revolving door, as he was about to swing in through it, came a lawyer friend. Jeff stopped him short.

"Have one with me," he said. The friend, instinctively sensing Jeff's party spirit, was more than willing.

They descended the stairs leading to the Mecca Café in the basement of the building.

"And what 'll yours be, Mr. — er — " asked the bartender, addressing Jefferson's friend with easy familiarity, at the same time making a Bronx cocktail, Jeff's usual beverage.

A mutual acquaintance joined them as they were draining their glasses. The meeting necessitated just one more. When that had been drunk, Jeff confided his great good luck to his lawyer friend.

Congratulations without champagne were not to be thought of. Nothing less than champagne befitted the occasion. Even though it was Jeff's friend who thus declared himself, it was Jeff who gave the order, and paid the check.

Nurse brought junior into the pretty suburban cottage, rosy and sparkling-eyed after a three-hours' romp. Helen met them on the porch.

It was a heart-warming spectacle, this meeting of mother and child, after a separation of a whole afternoon! He ran

pell-mell into her waiting arms and squeezed her tight around the neck.

"My darling! My baby boy!" Helen cried, her cheek against his. Then in a rush of love-laden words she tried to tell the lad of five the great good fortune that had come to them. Junior realized something of the truth.

"Are we going to be rich, mother?"

"We're going to be very happy," his mother amended with a hug that was all mother-love, world-old, warmed by the glow of ages.

Jefferson's comrades, seated now with him in a booth in a corner of the Mecca Café, shook with laughter.

"Thassa bes' one I've heard in—" snorted one of them, and then doubled up in a spasm of merriment, the audible evidence of which was a succession of hisses like the dying gasps of a seltzer bottle.

"Whassa matter with your steam-gage?" chortled the other of Jeff's companions, at the same time winking at his host as though to emphasize his own sobriety.

The man with the siphon-snicker insisted on finishing his self-interrupted appraisement of Jeff's funny story.

"Bes' one I've heard," he declared ponderously, "in—in a helluva while. Le's have another one, old boy."

Jeff took another sip of champagne. Three bottles now lay nose downward in the ice-bucket, their duty done. Jeff decided to tell just one more. "Did you ever hear the one about the—"

Helen kissed junior good night and hurried out of the house. She could reach the suburban station in ten minutes if she walked fast, and she had but twelve minutes.

There was a warm little melody in her heart singing to her as she stepped briskly along through the gathering dusk. At the corner she turned and cast a hurried glance back at the cottage, with its close-cropped hedge and new green lawn of late spring.

Why did nurse have all the lights going? Oh, well, it didn't matter—now. She smiled to herself at the thought as she hurried on. The days of strict economy were gone.

It was all very wonderful. They could buy the cottage now, as they had often dreamed of doing, when "things" got "more settled." They would buy the place and make necessary improvements—an extra room off the kitchen for a maid, a garage, perhaps. Very soon now the roses would begin to blossom along the path from the hedge-gate to the house. They could have everything finished for their anniversary in June, their seventh anniversary.

How swift the years! How completely had Jefferson justified her faith! Thirty years old—and one of New York's big attorneys! She had known it all the time—from that fair June morning when she had sat by Compton Gray's side at the commencement exercises.

And now it had come—and through Compton Gray. They must have him out to dinner just as soon as they had a competent maid. Jefferson would drive him out in their car and she would meet them at the gate. The world was very good.

Another quart was being held up for inspection by the waiter, and Jeff tossed him a ten-dollar bill.

"Imprisoned sunshine," he said airily. "Break the gyves and let it out."

The barrel-shaped waiter, unctuous with the bulge of fat tips in his pocket, ripped off the foil and twisted the wire that kept the cork captive.

"Good ol' grape," approved the man with the siphon exhaust thickly.

Jeff's lawyer friend scorned anything so prosaic. His mood was flighty, shod with fire. He seemed about to burst into something—probably song. The word "grape" lit the fuse of his Roman candle, and he spouted: "The grape! The grape!" And then:

> "The grape that can with Logic absolute
> The Two-and-seventy jarring Sects confute:
> The sovereign Alchemist that in a trice
> Life's leaden metal into Gold transmute!"

"Thassa stuff!" acclaimed the siphon one.

"And if a curse—why, then, who set it there?" the lawyer friend appended, looking at his two companions defiantly, as if they might be attorneys for the eternal opposition ready to spring at him with a demurrer or a cross-complaint.

As the waiter poured the wine Jeff's gaze roamed out into the bar and chanced to light upon something on the wall that held his attention and made his face go serious. It was a clock.

Quickly he drew his watch from his pocket. The clock was right! It was six eighteen! Helen was already on her way to town. They were to meet at the Astor in less than an hour!

He rose quickly. He was annoyed to find his legs a bit weak in the region of the knees. He felt a confounded inclination to sag.

But his head was clear. He shook it, to make sure. The lights in the place swam a little. They were blurred.

What was the matter with him, anyway? He sat down.

"George!"

The unctuous waiter brought the rounded amplitude of his person to the booth as quickly as a pair of flat feet would permit. The lawyer friend observed his ducklike advance and quoted: "The cypress-slender minister of wine!" The siphon one recorded sputtering approval.

"George," said Jeff, and his voice sounded like another's voice, "call me a taxi."

The waiter waddled away.

His companions turned upon him. They sang a coaxing duet, the theme of which was that well-known refrain beginning: "What's the hurry?" and insisting that "The evening's still a pup."

But Jeff, serious now that he realized his befuddled condition, listened to neither their coaxing nor their ridicule. The waiter waddled back to the booth with the information that the taxi was waiting. Jeff rose again and, bidding his companions a hasty and not overgracious good night, made his way with excessive dignity down the length of the brilliantly lighted room.

Acquaintances along the polished mahogany-counter turned and hailed him. Jeff paid no heed. Head high, he went out through the doors and climbed the stairs to the street.

"What's the matter with Lee?" asked one. "His hat's too small for him since he won those cases against the United."

"Not Jeff Lee," another asserted stoutly. "He isn't that kind. He's stewed, that's all. Mine 'll be a little more red liquor."

Jeff ordered the driver to take him to a Turkish bath near Times Square and to make it "snappy."

Helen's ride to town on the suburban local was a pilgrimage of fervent thanksgiving. The click of the wheels on the rails made metronomic cadence of the little tune in her heart.

There was no doubt of their future. Of course there never had been, from the start. But no, it was trebly certain, sealed unassailably. To any one watching her, Helen would have seemed to be looking out the window at the passing dark, trying to distinguish objects as they whirled by.

She saw nothing. Her eyes were wide, but she was dreaming. And in her dreams was a little boy, five years old, a sturdy youngster, the fruit of great love. And the boy was growing into a man, with every advantage that money and loving care could give. A man like his father.

The window of the taxi was open, and the air did Jeff a lot of good. The streetlights burned steadily and did not blur. When he got out of the cab in front of the Turkish-bath establishment he found the weakness gone from his legs.

Having dismissed the taxi he hurried inside. He still had three-quarters of an hour before Helen could reach the Astor. In short order he was in the hot room, giving vehement instructions to an attendant.

"I want to get steamed out—boiled out, if necessary; and in a hurry. I must leave here by seven o'clock."

The attendant fetched a brother husky, and together they threw Jefferson onto a slab and made of him cymbals and kettledrum, playing upon him something by Richard Strauss with their clenched fists; jerked him to his feet and led him to a needle-shower where cruel daggers, sharp as hatpins, made cowardly attack upon him from the rear; dried him off with towels made of steel-wire, charged with electricity; and, then, regarding the work of their art with cold, critical eyes, bade him lie down upon a leather couch, and wrapped him in sheets.

"We'll call youse," they reassured him. He had fifteen minutes in which to doze. It was very pleasant on the couch.

Helen arrived at the Astor and hurried to the ladies' parlor where Jefferson always met her on those evenings dedicated to dinner in town. She knew he would see her the moment she appeared in the doorway and would hurry over to her, smiling, with a little word of greeting and then something complimentary about her hat or gown—the dear thoughtfulness of love.

He always seemed so proud to be seen with her. She paused in the doorway. Jefferson did not come to meet her. She chose a chair near the door and sat down to wait.

The two husky rubbers threw other representative citizens into hot rooms, onto slabs and into needle-showers, and paid no heed to the marching minutes. A new arrival mentioned the hour thickly, this being the one fact that stuck in his mind after depositing his watch, along with other valuables, in the safe in the front office. "Sev'n thirty," he muttered, as if it were a matter to marvel at.

A light of dawning intelligence illumined the oxlike brow of one of the rubbers—a light so foreign to that brow as to give the effect of a halo.

"Holy mackerel!" he exclaimed to his brother torturer. "That guy in forty-two wanted to be called at seven."

They awakened Jeff, saying it was "Time to get up." It was not until he got his own watch from the safe that he knew how late it was.

Helen looked up expectantly as a familiar figure loomed in the doorway. Her quick flash of disappointment that the man was not Jefferson was followed by a little thrill of pleasure.

"Oh, Mr. Gray," she said.

He came to her side quickly and shook her hand warmly.

"This is indeed a pleasure," he said, dropping into a chair at her side. His keen, appraising eye swept her with a glance. "You haven't changed a bit. Let's see, how long has it been—eight years! Since that commencement!"

"I'm waiting for my husband," Helen explained. "Something has detained him. We're dining in town—a little celebration for the great good fortune you have brought us."

He waved away the suggestion that it was him to be thanked. She continued: "Could you join us?"

Gray was frankly sorry, but he, also, was waiting for a dinner companion—a business associate.

Out in the corridor leading to the ladies' parlor, a very pretty girl in a plain, blue tailor-made, a trim little figure, glanced up and down out of soft-gray eyes that seemed to be seeking some one, and yet were furtive, as if not wanting to be seen themselves.

She came to the door leading to the parlor and the soft-gray eyes looked within timidly. What they sought—those eyes—they saw.

But Compton Gray was sitting chatting with a pretty woman, a smartly gowned woman, an interesting-looking woman. And they were on terms of perfect understanding. Moreover, Compton Gray admired her greatly.

These few details were sun-clear to the soft-gray eyes—in the lightninglike flash of their glance. The trim little figure went down the corridor again and out into the street, the soft-gray eyes trying to be hard-gray eyes.

Jefferson hurried across the sidewalk and ran up the steps into the hotel. He fairly dashed down the corridor and into the ladies' parlor. To Gray he extended a hearty handshake. To Helen he murmured his apologies.

"Important business, dear. Terribly sorry." Helen was sweetly forgiving. Mr. Gray had made the time pass very quickly. And then they took leave of him and went on in to their own favorite corner-table in the orangerie.

Jefferson, so Helen decided joyfully, was never more attentive. There was tenderness in his manner. She could not know it was born of contrition. She was very proud of him.

As a matter of fact Jefferson was at his best. The work in the torture chamber of the Turkish bath had been well done!

Jefferson's hand trembled—a little—as he lifted the cocktail glass. Helen noted it.

Jefferson saw the glance at once, puzzled and solicitous. He forced a little laugh.

"The excitement of the day," he explained. Then they drank a silent toast to themselves. After the oysters Jefferson ordered champagne—a whole bottle.

"We're not church mice any longer," said Jefferson gaily. "Our ship has come in." They both laughed at the mixed metaphor. It was a lovely party.

"And now to plan a little," Jefferson said over the coffee. "You must come in to town to-morrow and begin to look for a new home—an apartment on the Drive or Central Park West. We can afford to pay five thousand a year for rent."

Helen's face went serious. About her pretty head came tumbling all her plans for buying the cottage. Wouldn't it be better, she urged, to stay out in the suburbs for junior's sake?

Jefferson smilingly declared it would not. The boy would thrive on the Drive or in the park. And surely she must realize it was going to be necessary now for them to begin to entertain. As usual Helen yielded; but the second doubt had crept into her heart.

Even as they lingered on in the orangerie a very pretty girl in a blue tailor-made climbed wearily up the steps of an old brownstone house and let herself in.

Once in her room on the third floor she threw herself on the bed and tears came uncontrollably from soft-gray eyes. Presently she sat bolt upright and clenched her hands together. "I wonder who she was!" she said. "I wonder who she was!"

She sat so, her hands clenched, for a little while. Then, with sudden revulsion of feeling, she told herself she was a little fool. "A cheap little fool, too," she muttered, "to follow him and spy on him!" And later: "I wonder who she was!"

CHAPTER III.

THE FAMILY FRIEND.

MARY LAWRENCE had her answer a little more than a month later.

Jefferson Lee had just won his first case for the United Machineries Corporation. The whole battery of the United's legal talent had been his aids and lieutenants. Although Gray had intimated that he might never try a case for them, it was Jefferson he put in full charge when trouble loomed over the horizon.

And Jefferson had stemmed the opposition's attack in such brilliant fashion as to bring the older lawyers to his side, eager to grasp his hand and do him homage. Compton Gray was present when the jury rendered the verdict. With the others, he came to Jefferson.

But he did not join with them in congratulations. Instead, he whispered: "Come to my office before you go home."

Helen was waiting in the limousine, outside the court. She had been present throughout the trial, and had driven her husband either to his office or up-town to the new apartment at the end of each day.

He came down the steps of the court-house and hurried to the waiting car. His eyes burned bright as he looked at the woman he adored, one foot on the running-board, and spoke to her through the open window.

"I'm going into conference here, dear," he said quickly, "and then back to the office. Supposing you do a bit of shopping or something, and meet me in Compton Gray's office at, say, quarter to five. He wants to see me. Perhaps we can drag him home to dinner."

Helen thought that would be fine. She told the liveried chauffeur where to take her, and then gave her husband's hand a squeeze that ripped her glove!

Jefferson hurried to the "conference." It was in part "Thirty-Six"—the title some newspaper wag long ago had given to Mike's saloon on the corner opposite the court-house.

An hour later Jefferson arrived at his own office, his face flushed, his eyes burning overbrightly. Nathaniel Stone, now his chief clerk and head of a staff of assistants — more than ever a gray wraith—ventured to follow his employer into the inner office, there to add his congratulations to the others.

To excuse the unusual, uninvited intrusion the old man brought with him a sheaf

of letters which he placed on the desk before Jefferson for his signature. Jefferson paid no attention to the stooped old figure at his elbow.

He picked up the letters and started to read the topmost one. Abruptly he laid it down. As abruptly he rose to his feet. Nathaniel Stone stepped back a pace and looked up inquiringly.

"They can wait until to-morrow," said Jefferson. "I have an appointment with Mr. Gray."

As he strode out of the office without seeming to hear the faltering attempt of his chief-clerk to congratulate him.

Jeff hurried up to the bar in the Mecca Café. A half dozen acquaintances greeted him loudly. Everybody was proud to hail him these days.

"Have one with me," Jeff said, laying a bill on the bar and including in the invitation the half dozen men nearest him. Before Jeff could decently leave he found it necessary to have "one" with each of the six.

Mary Lawrence, her trim figure clad now in the shepherd plaid that was the season's vogue in ready-to-wear garments, left Compton Gray's private office to find a certain letter in the files just a moment or two before Helen Lee was ushered in.

Gray was busy making lead-pencil memoranda as Helen entered the office. He rose quickly and greeted her warmly. She explained she had agreed to meet Jefferson there.

"We are conspirators," she added, her eyes dancing. "We have plotted together to drag you home to dinner."

"Rescued from a lonesome evening," Gray laughed, by way of acceptance. And then he picked up from the desk a check and handed it to Helen. It was for ten thousand dollars, and made payable to Jefferson Lee.

"A bonus," Gray explained. "He saved us a quarter of a million to-day."

Helen's lips quivered as she tried to voice her gratitude. "It means so much," she faltered, "for us—for us and the boy."

"Especially the boy, eh, little mother?" asked Gray, looking her in the eyes. Something he saw there made him turn and pick up the pen lying on the desk. He took the check from her and quickly wrote "Junior" after "Jefferson Lee."

Then he handed it back to her. Tears filled her eyes, and the room swam before her. In spite of herself she swayed—against him. His arm went about her.

Mary Lawrence had opened the door quietly. Neither of them saw her as she stood in the doorway, her eyes wide with amazement and horror. She drew back into the outer office, closing the door without a sound.

A moment later Jefferson entered, his face flushed and his big voice booming a greeting to Helen and Gray. Impetuously she put her arms around her husband's neck and gave him a hug.

Then she showed him the check, and told him, almost hysterically, how the sight of it had almost caused her to swoon.

In the outer office Mary Lawrence heard the sound of Jefferson's voice, and once again entered her employer's presence. She laid the letter on Gray's desk, and started to withdraw; but before she reached the door she heard Gray say, laughingly:

"And now Mr. and Mrs. Jefferson Lee, the victim of your plotting is ready to be led to his doom!" And thus they left the room.

Mary Lawrence sank into Gray's chair.

"So that's the way it is," she told herself.

The dinner that evening was a genuine success. There was a special vintage champagne that Gray praised highly—and of which he drank sparingly. Jefferson, taking the cue from the temperate guest, and sensible of the fact that he had already had as much as was good for him, also merely sipped the wine.

Dinner over, Gray insisted that Helen accompany them into the library while they drank their coffee and smoked cigars—Gray's cigars, the rich Havanas with their wide red bands and Gray's proud crest.

At just about the time Gray was taking his leave, Mary Lawrence, in her little room, had come to a comforting solution of her problem. Since Mrs. Lee was "the woman," there was no possibility of Gray's marrying her. That much was certain.

But men didn't care for "that kind," anyhow—not in a marrying way—even if there were a divorce—not fine men like Compton Gray. She would wait. The day must come when he would notice her.

And the poor little thing with her poor little head stuffed full of romance looked in the mirror and told herself she was pretty—with her soft gray eyes and trim little figure. Yes, she would wait.

When the door closed behind Gray, Jefferson and Helen voiced their mutual satisfaction over the success of the dinner. Helen expressed her unbounded admiration for their guest.

"I think he is your guiding star, dear," she added.

"I'm glad you feel that way about him," Jefferson said. "Be nice to him. It's good business."

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE WATER-WAGON.

AND when the great crisis came, a night in June, 1917, the great crisis of his life—

War had swept the world. In April the United States was sucked into the maelstrom.

Compton Gray was colonel of a national guard regiment, the "smart" regiment of the State—some said it was rather a rich man's club than a military organization. Swiftly this unit had been ushered into the Federal service—into businesslike khaki.

In the fair freshness of an afternoon in early May, Colonel Compton Gray, in service uniform, motored to the Riverside Drive apartment which the Jefferson Lees called home. The five years that had passed had made little change in him. At fifty he was a perfect specimen of vigorous middle age, a living testimonial to temperate thought, temperate action, temperate libation.

Helen met him in the library. With her came Junior, now ten years old. Junior liked Colonel Compton Gray. In his uniform he could claim the lad's boundless admiration. He plucked at Gray's coat, as Gray shook hands with Helen.

"Is my daddy going to be a soldier, too?" he asked.

Helen patted Junior's head as she gazed steadily at her caller. Junior repeated his question, still addressing Gray.

"That is what I want to talk to your mother about," he said. "She will tell you all about it after I am gone."

Junior ran out of the room, catching with something of his father's quickness that the colonel wished to be alone with his mother.

Helen continued to gaze steadily at Gray. He returned the look in kind. The intimacy that had developed between the man and the woman in five years was apparent in that look.

There was not the littlest hint of anything sordid about it. Theirs was the fine, clean relationship of a good man and a good woman.

"Helen," said Gray finally, "I hope you will believe that your happiness is of great concern to me."

She lowered her eyes in silent assent.

"Your happiness," and the tone was gruff, the manner aggressive, as one who expects opposition; "your happiness lies in seeing Jefferson play the man in this situation."

Helen understood. Without looking at him, she turned slowly and walked to a window overlooking the Drive. Thus she stood, her back to him.

"There is only one course open to you," he went on. "You must forget yourself; hide your fears. He must do his duty. And you must do yours. You must not only not do anything to discourage him in the performance of his duty; you must urge him to do it. It is a part far harder than his. But on your playing it depends your future happiness."

Helen did not turn. She continued to look out the window. Absent-mindedly Colonel Gray drew a cigar from his pocket, dropping the band into an ash-tray on the table.

He paced back and forth across the big room, the unlighted cigar in his mouth. And still Helen did not move.

Finally the woman reached a decision. Her head held high, she turned and faced

her visitor. Her lips were tremulous, attesting the agony in her soul, but courage was in her voice as she spoke.

"You are right, my dear, good friend," she said. "There is no way out—no honorable way."

Colonel Gray grasped her hand and held it firmly for a moment. "Now I can go to Jefferson and talk to him," he said.

And with a final admonition to say nothing of his visit to her husband, he hurried off.

Colonel Gray's fears regarding Jefferson's course of action proved groundless. Jefferson had forestalled him. He had already made application at Governors Island to join the officers' training corps, and was fired with new enthusiasm when Gray arrived at his office.

"I haven't enlisted as a private," he explained, "because I think I can be of greater use as an officer."

Colonel Gray concurred heartily, and left the younger man without mentioning his call upon Helen. Jefferson must believe Helen's support of her husband in doing his duty was wholly spontaneous.

Junior was wildly excited that evening when Jefferson came home to learn that his daddy was indeed going to be a soldier and fight for Uncle Sam. Helen was sweetly proud of her brave man, who—(above draft age and with exemption from even a moral obligation in view of his wife and child)—had seen in his country's need a duty that transcended all else.

She did not mention Gray's visit. Jefferson might misconstrue it. As a matter of fact, she was certain her own patriotism needed none of Colonel Gray's nursing.

After dinner Jefferson and Helen went in to the library. Junior followed a moment later, his father's cane for a musket, full of war.

Jefferson started to strike a match, and as he did so his eye was caught by the wide, red cigar-band in the ash-tray. He picked it up, and looked at the Gray crest. Then he looked at Helen.

Slowly he held up the band for her to see. Her eyes widened ever so little. Suddenly she took Junior's hand and led him gently from the room—to the nurse waiting in the hall. Then she returned to her husband.

It was so stupid of her not to have told Jefferson immediately. It made it all the more embarrassing now to have to explain her reason for not wishing to tell him that Colonel Gray had come to persuade her not to show the white feather. But she did explain, and bravely.

"Surely," said Jefferson when she finished, "there is no need for even such well-intended deception—between us."

But when he saw how pitifully sorry she was, he took her in his arms and kissed her. Jefferson was big and broad and full of understanding.

Colonel Gray was at his office early the next morning, but Mary Lawrence was there before him. As he let himself in by the private entrance, he was somewhat surprised to find his private secretary poring over the morning newspaper on his desk.

She looked up as he entered—an expression of fearful anxiety in her eyes—and timidly approached him, the paper in her hand. She held it out to him, her finger pointing to a big head-line.

He glanced at it and saw it was the announcement of the approaching departure of his regiment for its cantonment, and the prophecy that it would be among the first to take ship for France. He looked down at Mary Lawrence again, questioningly. She asked in a thin little voice if it meant that he was really going to war. The note in her voice caused Gray to evince open astonishment.

"Yes, of course," he said. "Why do you ask?"

For reply, Mary Lawrence suddenly threw herself into a chair beside the big, flat-topped desk and burst into a paroxysm of weeping.

Gray stared at her in dumb amazement. In a moment the pathetic little figure regained control of itself, and sat straight in the chair. Another moment, and she jumped to her feet and ran out of the office without so much as a glance at her employer.

In the locker room she put on her hat and coat, her little frame shaken with sobs. Then she hurried away.

Junior was puzzling over the big headlines in the same newspaper, lying flat on his little tummy on the floor of the breakfast-room in the Riverside Drive apartment. One very big word stuck him. He climbed to his feet and confronted his mother at the table, holding out the paper and pointing to the incomprehensible word.

In answer to his question, Helen explained the word was "Prohibited"—and even as she said it, she looked eagerly at the body of the article. Suddenly she jumped to her feet with a gasp of delight. The next instant she swept Junior off his feet and into her arms, showering his upturned face with kisses.

If he were amazed by this proceeding, his mother's next action left him outraged. For, as abruptly as she had picked him up she now set him down again, and fairly ran to the telephone.

"Oh, Jefferson," she said a moment later, into the transmitter. "Is it true: men in uniform are forbidden to drink?"

"That's the new army order, dear," said Jefferson. His voice was cheerful and pleasant as he added: "Of course, I'm not in uniform yet, but I feel the rule applies to me just the same. I'm on the wagon, dear—high and dry."

Helen told him he was the dearest man in the world, and then hung up the receiver and made straight for the butler's pantry. There, to the great horror of the English butler and the French chef, she poured into the sink every drop of liquor in the house—vintage champagnes, liqueur Scotch of great age and exquisite bouquet, cognacs—the almost priceless collection of a connoisseur.

As Jefferson emerged from his office building he started to turn down the stone stairs leading to the Mecca Café. He halted on the topmost step as he realized his self-imposed sentence of teetotalism.

He smiled at this instance of the force of habit. To a passing acquaintance he confided his error. They both laughed.

It was not so much a laughing matter—a little later, on his arrival at home—the news of the disposal of his wine cellar as told, smilingly by Helen. A shadow of annoyance crossed his brow.

It was really too bad to waste all those vintage champagnes and that especially choice liqueur Scotch. It was little less than a sacrilege to consign it to the river, via the sink. But when he saw the expression in Helen's eyes, he kissed her and guessed, after all, it was "just as well."

He was on the wagon for the duration of the war, and when the fighting was over the wine cellar could be restocked, of course. Then Helen confessed a secret. She had never wished to seem silly—his great success made it patent enough that it *was* silly—but for a long, long time she had worried about his drinking.

Jefferson laughed. One would think he was a drunkard. Why, he could take it or leave it alone. It was, indeed, silly of her to have worried, but then, all wives were like that. Why, he had never been anything more than a moderate drinker.

CHAPTER V.

"HAVE ONE WITH ME."

THREE weeks passed—without a drink for Jefferson. With each day his craving grew. Now, in his office, at the end of a long, hot, June afternoon, he found his appetite almost beyond control.

For a fortnight he had been telling himself it wasn't craving, it wasn't appetite. He was sure it was a desire for the cheering companionship of men, the sociability of the glass, rather than the glass itself. In the same spirit he had ascribed his bad temper, his fretful sleep, his "mean" feeling to a dozen different causes.

But now, at the end of the long day, the first he had spent in its entirety away from the training camp, he was willing to admit to himself that he wanted a drink for the sake of the drink alone, and wanted it more than he ever wanted anything before in all his life.

He found it took giant will-power not to descend the steps to the Mecca Café, when he left the building a little later. It was as if he were a fleck of steel, and the swinging doors of the Mecca a monstrous magnet, pulling him down.

But he struggled away and got into his

car and told the driver to go straight home, in a hurry.

He had lost not a little weight in these three weeks. Friends had commented on it. It was to be expected. The first month of unwonted exercise always reacts that way on men past thirty. That is what his friends said.

Jefferson knew better. He was losing weight because inside him was an aching void, a constantly gnawing cavity.

These three weeks had reduced poor little Mary Lawrence to an almost penniless condition. She had not gone back to the offices of the United Machineries Corporation after that fateful day of her breakdown. She couldn't bear the thought of going back, now that *he* knew!

Instead, she moved her modest effects to another part of town, and had worn herself out hunting another job—when she discovered Compton Gray had instituted a search for her. Jobs were evidently being Hooverized like wheat, and more so. Every day was a jobless day for Mary Lawrence.

Now, eating a sandwich in her hall bedroom, she glanced through the news columns of the evening paper after having scanned the "Help Wanted, Female" columns. Not a little space was devoted to the advance description of the Red Cross ball to be given that evening by the crack regiment of which Compton Gray was colonel.

She wondered if she could manage to get in—as a spectator, in the gallery. In the waning light of the warm June day, she began a pitifully inadequate attempt to make herself presentable.

At the same time, in her magnificently appointed boudoir, Helen Lee was trying to choose between three new ball gowns. Each was a vision.

It was her French maid who decided for her. When Annette declared with Latin enthusiasm that the old rose with silver trimmings was *assurement* the most becoming—Helen promptly chose the simpler creation of filmy, white tulle. Helen was a wonderful wife, a wonderful mother—but, thank Heavens, she was after all just a woman!

Hearing Jefferson come in, she hurried forward in the apartment and found him in the library. He kissed her perfunctorily, and abruptly stepped away from her. If she felt hurt she managed to conceal it, smiling brightly as she explained they must both hurry and dress for the dance.

Jefferson said it was out of the question for him to think of going to the ball. Helen voiced her astonishment. They had planned to go—for weeks.

Jefferson realized he must explain. The three weeks of physical training, he told her, combined with the hard study that had ended in the mental examinations yesterday, and the closing up of his legal affairs to-day, had left him exhausted. He was sorry to disappoint her, awfully sorry.

"It's all right, dear," said Helen impulsively. "I'll stay home with you." Jefferson wouldn't hear of such a thing. She must go.

"I'll stay home and try to read," he said. "Perhaps I can take a nap. I'll come for you, say, at eleven thirty." The dance was to end at midnight.

Jefferson saw his wondrously beautiful wife, in a great evening cloak of white crêpe de Chine with deep trimmings of white fox, out of the apartment and down in the elevator, into the limousine.

He stood on the sidewalk a moment and watched the car roll silently away. Then he turned and started back into the building.

In the library he sank into a chair and picked up a magazine. He turned the pages idly, staring at them with unseeing eyes. Suddenly he sprang to his feet and began to pace the room.

He stopped short and looked toward the door leading into the hall. A cunning determination showed in his eyes. He left the room—a fleck of steel drawn by a magnet. In a moment he was in the butler's pantry.

Feverishly he threw open the white-enameled doors of the built-in cupboard. Perhaps some one bottle might have been overlooked. He slammed the doors shut and went back to the library, pacing back and forth—back and forth.

Mary Lawrence managed to smuggle her-

self into the armory past a good-natured sergeant. She was a trim little figure in her best street-suit—and a pleading in her soft gray eyes that made an admission ticket all unnecessary.

She found a seat in the gallery, beside a Red Cross nurse in uniform. The nurse—herself young and alone—engaged Mary Lawrence in conversation. Out of the exchange of confidences came a sudden realization on Mary's part that even she might play a worth-while rôle in the crisis confronting her country. The Red Cross was desperately in need of nurses!

Of a sudden Mary made out the handsome figure of Colonel Compton Gray, dancing with a lovely vision in filmy white. When the dance ended the couple slowly sauntered across the floor to a palm-surrounded corner.

Murmuring an apology to her companion for leaving, Mary edged her way through the gallery throng toward the corner. There was a circular staircase leading down to the armory floor.

She descended the iron steps on tiptoe and crouched part way down, directly above the man and woman. The first words she heard distinctly froze her into amazement.

"And now," Colonel Gray was saying, "for the surprise. You're going to have supper with me—in my rooms, at midnight."

The soft gray eyes of Mary Lawrence went wide. Her big chance had come! She hated this beautiful woman, had always hated her. Now was the moment of her revenge!

Noiselessly she hurried back up the staircase and out of the big building. In a drug store, presently, she found Jefferson Lee's address in the telephone book. Then she started for the subway.

The statement that filled Mary Lawrence with insane jealousy caused Helen Lee to gaze at Colonel Gray with an expression of surprise—but her eyes reflected the amused smile that illumined the frank countenance of the man she knew so well.

"It *sounds* tremendously improper," she said.

"It isn't," Colonel Gray declared. "We're to be fairly well chaperoned—by your husband!"

Helen laughed. Then, recalling Jefferson's mood at dinner, she became serious—and voiced a hope that he would be less "down" when he arrived at eleven thirty.

"If he isn't," Colonel Gray explained, "he will be when I tell him the news. He passed yesterday's examinations with high honors.

"As soon as I heard of it, I got busy and made application to Washington to have him assigned to this regiment. Late this afternoon I received word my application would be granted as soon as he receives his commission."

His expression changed. He was whimsically reminiscent as he continued.

"Do you remember," he asked, "what I told you that day in Heath Memorial Hall? Well, I'm going to continue to keep my eye on your husband."

Helen was pleased beyond words at the thought of the little party, and of the wonderful surprise which she knew would please Jefferson so much. They would start away from the armory, all three together, and Jefferson would not know their destination until they arrived at Colonel Gray's bachelor apartment. It would be lovely!

Mary Lawrence stood in the inner hallway of the Lee's apartment while the sleepy butler went to find his master. Betimes he returned to say that Mr. Lee had gone out. Mary insisted on awaiting his return. She had urgent business with him.

It spoke volumes for her powers of self-control—the fact that the butler saw nothing of menace in her steady gray eyes. He showed her into the library, where she took a seat.

Jefferson Lee turned into the brilliantly lighted saloon, two blocks away from the apartment house. He poured "a double hooker" of brandy into a long, highball glass. It was to be his only drink, and he wanted to have it over with quickly.

But even as he set the glass on the bar, he was aware of the presence of some one beside him. He turned his head and his eyes met the gaze of old Nathaniel Stone.

"I understand," said the old law clerk simply. "I've known it a long time. With

you, it's come to be medicine. It's the same with me."

Jefferson showed his astonishment. He would have sworn that the little, old, quiet-mannered law clerk had never touched a drop of liquor in his life. Nathaniel Stone smiled a little.

"Nobody knows," he said, "but I'd die without it. My dear wife has no idea of it. For forty years I've kept it secret. Every night I take a little walk before I go to bed—a little walk—and a nightcap."

For a brief space Jefferson forgot his determination to hurry out of the place. The discovery that his law clerk was a secret drinker—almost as much as the effects of the stiff drink of brandy—struck him so forcibly as actually to daze him.

"And now, sir," Stone was saying, "since we are so happily met, will you do me the great honor of having one with me?"

Jefferson came back to earth with a thud. He could not possibly think of having another. He must go. The old man put a restraining hand on his arm. He was truly pathetic.

"It gets pretty hard, always drinking alone," he said simply. He drew an old leather purse from his pocket and put some silver on the bar. The bartender addressed Jefferson. "The same?" he inquired.

After all, his old law clerk had been a faithful employee. It would give him pleasure out of all proportion to the cost to Jefferson—to allow him to play host—after years of almost servile service.

And, according to the ethics of the saloon, Jefferson really had no adequate cause for refusing. He was not on the wagon. He nodded to the bartender.

They raised their glasses in silent salute. Jefferson sipped the double-strength brandy highball this time. It was good brandy. The connoisseur in him would not permit any hasty gulping down of such really fine liqueur.

Nathaniel Stone was talking at his elbow. What he was saying Jefferson did not know. He merely heard the drone and cackle of a voice. The brandy was warm within him. He felt the tingle of it in his finger-tips. It was very pleasant. Presently they were together at a table in the back room.

Still later, Nathaniel, his eyes watery, leaned over and put a hand on Jefferson's forearm.

"And now, Mr. Lee," he said gravely, "I want to tell you of the great tragedy in my life—the sad misfortune that prevented me becoming an associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States."

Jefferson decided suddenly that it was time to go. Rising resolutely, and without a word to his law clerk, he walked stiffly out of the family entrance and started toward his apartment.

Eleven thirty had come and gone; so had eleven forty-five. It was nearing midnight. At Helen's request, Colonel Gray had telephoned the apartment.

The butler explained that Jefferson had gone out. It was all right, then, they thought. He was on his way to the armory.

Jefferson let himself into the apartment quietly. As he tiptoed unsteadily along the hall, Mary Lawrence saw him pass the library door and swiftly sprang after him.

He turned as she called his name. He recognized her and asked thickly what she was doing in his apartment at this hour.

"Your wife," she hissed, "is right now alone with Compton Gray in his rooms!"

Jefferson heard every word distinctly, but their sense was slow in dawning on him. He stared at the blazing-eyed girl in dull incomprehension. Mary Lawrence misread his gaze.

"If you don't believe me," she said, "go to his rooms and see for yourself!"

The fog in Jefferson's brain was dissipated by sudden, hot, leaping flames of red! A madman, he pushed the girl out of his way and rushed at the door, pulling it wide open and slamming it shut behind him.

The butler hurried into the hall just as Mary Lawrence was herself opening the door to make her exit. To his question, she replied with all the suppressed hate of yet unsatisfied vengeance.

"He's gone to Colonel Gray's—to find his wife!" And then she, too, slammed the door behind her.

The telephone rang. The flustered butler answered it. Again Colonel Gray was

on the wire. The butler had no wish to see his master and mistress break up their home. He had the innate, British dislike for tragedies.

Besides, in these war times, good jobs—for butlers—were scarce. Hence he tried to make the tone of his voice sound the warning his long years of training made it impossible for him to put in words.

"Mr. Lee is on his way to your apartment, sir," he said.

Colonel Gray hurried from the telephone booth in the armory to Helen. He told her the news. It was puzzling, but perhaps Jefferson, himself, had had word of his assignment to Colonel Gray's regiment.

In any event they could now start for Gray's apartment. Jefferson would be awaiting them there.

But he had not yet arrived when they reached Gray's rooms. The Japanese valet had seen nothing of him.

And then he came! As the valet opened the door the madman rushed past him and on into the living-room where Helen and Gray stood by a table.

He stopped short just inside the doorway, his breast heaving, his eyes lit with insane fury. His gaze was fixed on the man; he did not seem to see Helen.

He swayed—and then caught the back of a chair. He lurched across the intervening space and leaned across the table, pointing a shaking finger at Gray.

"I'm going to kill you," he said.

Before either Gray or Helen could move he seized a bronze vase from the table and raised it above his head. Gray leaped forward and seized his wrist.

The vase fell to the floor with a thud. Gray released his hold on the drunken man.

"You contemptible thing!" he said.

Jefferson eyed him narrowly, his breath coming hard. A stifled sob from Helen made him look at her for the first time. She had turned her back! Was it possible that *he* was at fault?

Was it—not her own shame—but because she was ashamed of him that she could not face him now? He looked back at Gray. The gaze that met his was not the gaze of a guilty man. There was loathing in it.

He was mistaken, then! His hand went up to his throat involuntarily. His mouth twitched.

Gray drew from his pocket a telegram and handed it to Jefferson. Jefferson glanced at it with unseeing eyes and then back at Gray.

"If you are unable to read it," said Gray slowly, and every word was like the lash of a whip, "I will tell you that it assigns you to my regiment with a second lieutenant's commission."

Gray paused. As from a great distance Jefferson heard the stifled sobs of a woman—his woman—Helen—his wife. But he continued to stare dully at Gray.

"So far as I am concerned," Gray went on slowly, distinctly, "nothing will interfere with this assignment. It is up to you!"

Ah! At last Jefferson understood. The hideous disgrace of his position struck him as hard as a blow from Gray's sinewy arm.

His brain cleared. His eyes closed to slits. He bowed his head.

Then, slowly, he tore the telegram to bits! Without lifting his eyes, he turned on his heel and walked out of the apartment!

Helen turned as she heard the door shut. Gray silently put the wrap about her shoulders and led her out of the apartment.

He saw her into her limousine, and, without a word from her, directed the driver to take her home.

Jefferson sped to his office in a taxicab. As the car dashed along through the deserted cañons of lower Manhattan, its passenger tried desperately to piece together those torrential events that followed that first maddening moment when Mary Lawrence faced him in the hallway of his home.

Try as he would he could not make anything stand out so clearly as the curious, fascinating pattern of the Persian rug on the floor of Gray's living-room! But little by little he realized the enormity of his offense.

It was not alone the wicked wrong he had done his wife, the mother of his boy! it was not alone the crushing contempt of Gray, the man to whom he owed so much—the earned contempt of his benefactor!

No! Unbearable as was the thought of

both, there was something worse, something more wholly despicable! There was himself!

Alone in his private office in the deserted building, Jefferson worked through the night arranging his affairs so that Helen and Junior should not suffer financially. At dawn he left the building and ordered the waiting taxi to take him to the Grand Central Station.

The French maid brought Helen a note early in the morning—brought it to the locked door of her boudoir, and explained it had just been brought by hand from Mr. Lee's office. Helen unlocked the door and took it from the maid. It was from Jefferson.

"I am going away to fight—myself," it read. "If I win, I will come back to you, a man, to ask your forgiveness."

CHAPTER VI.

THE WINNING FIGHT.

IN a little Connecticut town, Jefferson presented himself before a recruiting sergeant. In short order he was examined and accepted—as John Logan.

At the end of a week he had his first taste of guard duty. It was raining hard, a cold, night rain. In the morning he was ill. They took him to the field hospital. Within an hour he was delirious.

John Logan's case was pronounced hopeless—double pneumonia in its worst form. But attached to this especial field hospital was Henry Stanton, one of the country's greatest specialists in the treatment of alchol and drug addicts.

Inspired by a knowledge that the percentage of fatalities in cases of pneumonia among entrants in the National army was unreasonably large, Dr. Stanton determined to take personal charge of this especially difficult case.

"An exceptionally fine instance," he told a colleague after an exhaustive examination of John Logan, "of the ravaging effects of alcohol on a system that gave no outward evidences of it up to the time of the exposure to unaccustomed physical hardship.

"A cure in this case will have a twofold value. It will make the man a sober citizen and send him out to tell others—*moderate drinkers*, as they call themselves—the truth about the greatest destructive agent in the world!"

To give the stricken man every possible chance for his life, Dr. Stanton ordered an assistant nurse to be assigned to his bedside day and night. A newly arrived apprentice—a soft, gray-eyed girl with a trim little figure—was one of the three to be assigned to this duty.

When she first looked at the patient, raving in his delirium, she recognized him! John Logan? Not he. But she kept her own counsel.

Helen moved back to the suburbs; back to the little cottage where Junior was born. She took a long-time lease on it, with an option to purchase.

No word had come from Jefferson. Junior believed his daddy was fighting. His mother had told him so—fighting bravely, too!

Still, they didn't have one of those service flags in their window—like other houses had—and Junior couldn't understand the reason, no matter how hard his mother tried to explain!

Colonel Gray and his regiment were in the cantonment not far distant from the suburban town in which Helen reestablished her home. Gray had helped her in her negotiations with the rental agent. Occasionally he called.

Dr. Stanton saved John Logan's life. To him was all the credit. How much of it was rightly Mary Lawrence's is not to be computed accurately, but Jefferson knew a large share of his successful fight against death was due to her quiet and devoted ministrations.

He had recognized her soon after he came out of the delirium. With the recognition came a blinding impulse to throttle her—the cause of his disgrace! But, finally, in reply to his agonized question, she told him why she had done this monstrous wrong.

And he realized the pity of it and the aching sorrow in the breast of this poor little creature who fed on romance. And she, in turn, slowly sensed her own distorted

view-point. And, being a woman, she promptly set about making reparation.

Thus it happened that Colonel Gray, at headquarters, received presently a long letter—unsigned and, in spite of patent laboriousness, patently the product of a well-nigh hysterical woman—a letter that explained everything. Most important, it contained the information that John Logan was in fact Jefferson Lee, a convalescent at a field hospital attached to a designated Connecticut division.

Colonel Gray dictated a letter to John Logan immediately. It advised him merely of the changed address of Mrs. Jefferson Lee!

The day that Mary Lawrence bade goodby to John Logan marked her promotion to a full nurse-ship. She left him in his wheel-chair where he sat out under a budding apple-tree.

She was taking ship for France in three days! She was happy.

After her came Dr. Stanton. He stood beside his prize patient and began to question him. Jefferson admitted that he had averaged probably "seven or eight drinks a day" over a period of fifteen years. Dr. Stanton made a quick computation on the back of an envelope.

"I wonder," he said, "if you have any idea how much pure alcohol that means."

Jefferson had never given the matter a thought.

"At your own figures," the specialist went on, "you have taken into your system, in 5,475 days, pure alcohol to the amount of 350 gallons—five and one-half hogsheads!"

It was a staggering thought. Jefferson shook his head slowly in contemplation of the dreadful total. Dr. Stanton knew his business. He proved it now.

"You are cured—absolutely cured—and it is permanent—if you want it to be permanent. From now on you need have no fear of returning desire to drink. The desire is absolutely gone.

"In seven weeks the system is rid of the last traces of the poison. You have been almost ten weeks without a drink. You need alcohol now no more than a man who never tasted it."

The specialist paused a moment. Jefferson gazed at him appealingly. Every word was music to his soul. If only it were true! Dr. Stanton understood.

"The only risk you run now," he explained, "is *memory*. If the *memory* of that former desire gets the better of you, you will fall. But so long as you keep uppermost in your mind that it is only memory and not desire, you are safe."

Jefferson's expression slowly changed. The specialist studied him closely. He put out his hand.

"You are safe, sir," he said.

With his discharge from the hospital came an honorable discharge from the army. He was as fit as when he enlisted—but with the passing time had come strict requirements by the physical examining board.

He was constitutionally too weak to be acceptable in any branch of the service. Yet he *appeared* to be a perfectly healthy specimen!

Late in the afternoon of the following day as Jefferson neared the pretty suburban home where the first days of his married happiness had been spent, a big automobile filled with joy-riders whirled past the house. Junior was playing in the front yard. One of the occupants of the car threw a whisky flask "overboard," supposing drunkenly it was empty.

It fell on the grass at Junior's feet. With boyish, mischievous curiosity, he picked it up and started for the house. His mother, on the porch, knitting a sweater, did not see him.

Through the little flower garden at the back of the house came Jefferson. Peering through a window in the living-room he saw his son entering with the flask in his hand; saw him stick a finger in the open neck of the flask; saw him as he tilted the bottle and wet the finger; saw him as he withdrew it and started to stick it in his cherry-lipped mouth!

Jefferson smashed the pane with his walking-stick; leaped into the room, and dashed the flask from his son's hand. It crashed into the fireplace. The frightened child found himself crushed against the man's breast.

Helen dropped her knitting and ran into the house at the sound of the broken window.

For a space they stood looking at each other. Finally Jefferson set Junior down tenderly and approached his wife. She took him into her arms as if he were her baby.

From a distance came the music of a regimental band. Junior ran to the front windows and cried out "Soldiers!" His parents joined him at the window and watched the regiment march by, the fine upstanding lads with their fine upstanding colonel at their head.

As the last of the column filed past, Junior looked up at his father and voiced a question.

"Aren't you going to fight any more, daddy?"

Jefferson seemed to pay no heed to the question of the boy. His eyes looked steadily into Helen's. Yet his words framed an answer.

"No," he said gravely, "I've fought my fight—and I've won."

(The end.)

THROUGH THE YEARS

BY EDWARD S. MORRISSEY

BEEN fishin', sonny? Let me see!
Is that two fish you got, or three?
It's *four,* you say? Well, bless your soul!
I guess none didn't break your pole.
Is that the best that you could ketch?
When we was boys we wouldn't fetch
Them little chaps to home. We'd say
That they'd be bigger ones some day,
An' let 'em have a chance to grow;
But that, you know, was years ago.

Why, right down there in Jimson's pool,
When I was just a lad at school,
I cut a rod about so thin,
An' took a string an' bent a pin,
An' used an angleworm for bait;
An', gettin' long toward gettin' late,
I caught a trout weighed seven pound.
By gosh, his floppin' shook the ground!
I guess you think that that ain't so;
But that, you know, was years ago.

Ah, halcyon times, those days of yore
That tripped away to come no more!
Their trout were of heroic size,
Their gnats outgrew our butterflies;
And he who stands upon time's rim—
Though all to-day is waxing dim—
Can see a meadow laced with dew,
Where daisies once as lofty grew
As now the nodding cowslips grow;
But that, you know, was years ago.

The Conquest of the Moon Pool

by A. Merritt

A Sequel to "The Moon Pool"

A "DIFFERENT" SERIAL

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

FOLLOWING the strange and inexplicable disappearance of Dr. David Throckmartin's wife, his associate, Dr. Stanton, and his wife's maid, Thora Helverson, in the uncanny depths of the Moon Pool, and the still more amazing disappearance of Throckmartin himself from the ship Southern Queen, in midocean (the details of which have already been given to the world in a statement made by Dr. Walter T. Goodwin, Ph.D., F. R. G. S., and published in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, June 22, 1918), Dr. Goodwin, backed by the International Association of Science, set out to investigate thoroughly the appalling phenomena, and if possible effect a rescue of the victims.

While proceeding toward the Caroline Islands, on the outlying island of which, Nan-Matal, was the entrance to the vast cavern in which was the Moon Pool, in the little sailing vessel, Suwarna, Captain Da Costa, they encountered another small vessel, the Brunhilda, Captain Olaf Huldricksson. Olaf, a huge giant of a man, was alone on the ship, his hands lashed to his wheel and in the last stages of exhaustion. From him, when he had been cared for, they learned that a "sparkling devil" had come down the path of the moon and taken his wife and his little daughter, Freda. The crew, terrified, had deserted the ship, and he, binding his wrists to the wheel that he might keep awake, had followed the direction taken by the sparkling devil. On learning of Dr. Goodwin's mission, he willingly consented to join him, and the two, with Larry O'Keefe (a young half-American, half-Irish member of the Royal Air Force, whom the Suwarna had picked up from his wrecked hydroplane the day after the rescue of Olaf), landed on Nan-Matal.

The full of the moon was past, but by means of light condensers Dr. Goodwin managed to focus the moon rays in sufficient strength to cause the rock door to the Moon Pool to open. Scarcely had it done so when Olaf, shrieking, rushed through the portal; a rifle cracked, and the bullet, missing O'Keefe by a narrow margin, shattered a condenser. The next moment a figure catapulted out of the shadows, and in a second O'Keefe and the stranger were struggling on the threshold of the Moon Rock. They rolled past the opened slab, Dr. Goodwin following. It was over in a moment, however, and presently the Irishman rose, leaving the stranger unconscious on the rock floor.

Even as he did so, however, the great rock door, released by the breaking of the light condenser, swung to, and they were imprisoned in the lair of the Dweller of the Moon Pool.

The stranger proved to be Dr. von Hetzdorp, a German scientist, with whom they finally concluded a truce for the benefit of all. After passing around the Moon Pool they came to a blank wall, where a beautiful girl accompanied by a huge frog-woman appeared to them, and by signs showed them the secret springs that opened the wall before them. From then on adventures came thick and fast until at last they arrived in a vast country, miles below the surface, where existed a race of powerful dwarfs, ruled over by a beautiful woman, Yolara, priestess of the Shining One, and Lugur, "the Voice," a man of herculean strength. Yolara soon showed that she is attracted by O'Keefe (thereby arousing the fury of Lugur), but Larry, having fallen in love with the vision

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

of the Moon Pool Chamber—whom he has learned is Lakla, handmaiden of the Silent Ones, and as good as Yolara is evil—did not respond.

The German and Lugur joined forces, and though their enmity to the Americans was carefully veiled, it was none the less sinister and threatening. That the powerful influence of Lakla and the Silent Ones is on their side, however, gives Larry and Dr. Goodwin hope.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LOVELY LAND OF LURKING HATE.

AS I reached Rador I looked at my watch, which I had taken the precaution to wind before preparing for sleep. It had then been eleven o'clock of the morning in our world outside. Now the watch registered four—but whether we had slept five hours or seventeen or twenty-nine I had no means of knowing. Rador scanned the dial with much interest; drew from his girdle a small disk, and compared the two.

His had thirteen divisions and, beneath the circle marking them, another circle divided into smaller spaces. About each circle a small glowing point moved. What he held was, in principle, a watch the same as mine—but I could not know upon what system their time recording was based.*

"Two *va* we have before the council sits," he said, thrusting the disk back in his girdle. "As a man of learning you are to be shown whatever of ours may interest you—while the *Afyo Maie* sits with that of yours which certainly interests her," he said, maliciously. "But this I warn you—how are you named, stranger?"

"Goodwin," I answered.

"Goodwin!" he repeated as excellently as had Yolara. "This I must warn you, Goodwin—that I will answer you all I may, but some things I must not and you shall know by my silence what these are."

On fire with eagerness I hurried on. A shell was awaiting us. I paused before entering it to examine the polished surface of runways and great road. It was obsidian—volcanic glass of pale emerald, unflawed, translucent, with no sign of block or juncture. It was, indeed, as though it had been poured molten, and then gone over as carefully as a jeweler would a gem. I examined the shell.

"What makes it go?" I asked Rador. At a word from him the driver touched a concealed spring and an aperture appeared beneath the control-lever, of which I have spoken in a preceding chapter. Within was a small cube of black crystal, through whose sides I saw, dimly, a rapidly revolving, glowing ball, not more than two inches in diameter. Beneath the cube was a curiously shaped, slender cylinder winding down into the lower body of the Nautilus whorl.

"Watch!" said Rador. He motioned me into the vehicle and took a place beside me. The driver touched the lever; a stream of coruscations flew from the ball down into the cylinder. The shell started smoothly, and as the tiny torrent of shining particles increased it gathered speed.

"The *corial* does not touch the road," explained Rador. "It is lifted so far"—he held his forefinger and thumb less than a sixteenth of an inch apart—"above it."

And perhaps here is the best place to explain the activation of the shells or *coria*.

* Later I was to find that reckoning rested upon the extraordinary increased luminosity of the cliffs at the time of full moon on earth—this action, to my mind, being linked either with the effect of the light streaming globes upon the Moon Pool, whose source was in the shining cliffs, or else upon some mysterious affinity of their radiant element with the flood of moonlight on earth—the latter, most probably, because even when the moon must have been clouded above, it made no difference in the phenomenon. Thirteen of these shinings forth constituted a *laya*, one of them a *lat*. Ten was *sa*; ten times ten times ten a *said*, or thousand; ten times a thousand was a *sais*. A *sais* of *laya* was then literally ten thousand years. What we would call an hour was by them called a *va*. The whole time system was, of course, a mingling of time as it had been known to their remote, surface-dwelling ancestors, and the peculiar determining factors in the vast cavern.

Unquestionably there is a subtle difference between time as we know it and time in this subterranean land—its progress there being slower. This, however, is only in accord with the well-known doctrine of relativity, which predicates both space and time as necessary inventions of the human mind to orient itself to the conditions under which it finds itself. I tried often to measure this difference, but could never do so to my entire satisfaction. The closest I can come to it is to say that an hour of our time is the equivalent of an hour and five-eighths in Muria. For further information upon this matter of relativity the reader may consult any of the numerous books upon the subject.

The force utilized was atomic energy. Passing from the whirling ball the ions darted through the cylinder to two bands of a peculiar metal affixed to the base of the vehicles somewhat like skids of a sled. Impinging upon these they produced a partial negation of gravity, lifting the shell slightly, and at the same time creating a powerful repulsive force or thrust that could be directed backward, forward, or sidewise at the will of the driver. The creation of this energy and the mechanism of its utilization were, briefly, as follows:

[Dr. Goodwin's lucid and exceedingly comprehensive description of this extraordinary mechanism has been deleted by the Executive Council of the International Association of Science as too dangerously suggestive to scientists of the Central European Powers with which we are at war. It is allowable, however, to state that his observations are in the possession of experts in this country, who are, unfortunately, hampered in their research not only by the scarcity of the radioactive elements that we know, but also by the lack of the element or elements unknown to us that entered into the formation of the fiery ball within the cube of black crystal. Nevertheless, as the principle is so clear, it is believed that these difficulties will ultimately be overcome.—J. B. K., President, I. A. of S.]

The wide, glistening road was gay with the *coria*. They darted in and out of the gardens; within them the fair-haired, extraordinarily beautiful women on their cushions were like princesses of Elfland, caught in gorgeous fairy webs, resting within the hearts of flowers. In some shells were flaxen-haired, dwarfish men of Lugur's type; sometimes black-polled brother officers of Rador; often raven-tressed girls, plainly handmaidens of the women: and now and then beauties of the lower folk went by with one of the blond dwarfs—and then it was plain indeed what *their* relations were.

Among those who walked along the paralleling promenade were none of the fair-haired. And the haunting wistfulness that underlay the thin film of gaiety on the faces and in the eyes of the black-haired folk, and its contrast with the sinisterly sweet malice, the sheer, unhuman exuberance of life written upon the fair-haired, made something deep, deep, within me tremble with indefinable repulsion.

We swept around the turn that made of the jewel-like roadway an enormous horseshoe and, speedily, upon our right the cliffs through which we had come in our journey from the Moon Pool began to march forward beneath their mantels of moss. They formed a gigantic abutment, a titanic salient. It had been from the very front of this salient's invading angle that we had emerged; on each side of it the precipices, faintly glowing, drew back and vanished into distance.

At the bridge-span we had first crossed, Rador stopped the *corial*, beckoning me to accompany him. We climbed the arch and stood once more upon the mossy ledge. Half a score of the dwarfs were cutting into the cliff face, using tools much resembling our own pneumatic drills, except that they had no connection with any energizing machinery. The drills bit in smoothly but slowly. I imagined that their power was supplied by the same force that ran the *coria*, and asked Rador. He nodded.

"They search for your disappearing portal," he grinned, mischievously. I thought of the depth of that monstrous slice of solid stone that had dropped before us and over whose top we had passed through the hundred-foot tunnel and I felt fairly certain that they would not soon penetrate to the well of the stairway that it concealed and to which the Golden Girl had led us. And I was equally sure the art that had covered this entrance so amazingly had provided at the same time a screen for the oval, high above, through which our eyes had first beheld the city of the Shining One.

Somewhat grimly I asked Rador why they did not use the green ray to disintegrate the rock—as it had the body of Sangar. He answered that they did use it—but sparingly.

There were two reasons for this, he went on to explain: first, that, in varying degrees, all the rock walls resisted it; the shining cliffs on the opposite side of the White Waters completely. And, second, that when it was used it was at the risk of very dangerous rock falls. There were, it appeared, lines of non-resistance in the cliffs—faults, I suppose—which, under the *Keth*, disintegrated instantaneously. These lines of

non-resistance could not be mapped out beforehand and were likely to bring enormous masses of the resistant portion tumbling down, exactly, I gathered, as a structure of cemented stone would tumble if the cement should abruptly crumble into dust.

They seldom used the ray, therefore, for tunneling or blasting rock *in situ*. The resistant qualities of the barriers were probably due to the presence of radioactive elements that neutralized the vibratory ray whose essence was, of course, itself radioactive.

The slender, graceful bridges under which we skimmed ended at openings in the upflung, far walls of verdure. Each had its little garrison of soldiers. Through some of the openings a rivulet of the green obsidian river passed. These were roadways to the farther country, to the land of the *ladala*, Rador told me; adding that none of the lesser folk could cross into the pavilioned city unless summoned or without pass.

We turned the bend of the road and flew down that further emerald ribbon we had seen from the great oval. Before us rose the shining cliffs and the lake. A half-mile, perhaps, from these the last of the bridges flung itself. It was more massive and about it hovered a spirit of ancientness lacking in the other spans; also its garrison was larger and at its base the tangent way was guarded by two massive structures, somewhat like blockhouses, between which it ran. Something about it aroused in me an intense curiosity.

"Where does that road lead, Rador?" I asked.

"To the one place above all of which I may not tell you, Goodwin," he answered. And again I wondered—and into my wonder burst a thought. Did the road lead to Throckmartin and those others the Dweller had made its prey? How could I find out?

We skimmed slowly out upon the great pier. Far to the left was the prismatic, rainbow curtain between the Cyclopean pillars. On the white waters graceful shells—lacustrian replicas of the Elf chariots—swam, but none was near that distant web of wonder.

"Rador—what is that?" I asked.

"It is the veil of the Shining One!" he answered slowly.

Was the Shining One that which we named the Dweller?

"*What* is the Shining One?" I cried, eagerly. Again he was silent. Nor did he speak until we had turned on our homeward way.

And lively as my interest, my scientific curiosity, were—I was conscious suddenly of acute depression. Beautiful, wondrously beautiful, this place was—and yet in its wonder dwelt a keen edge of menace, of unease—of inexplicable, inhuman wo; as though in a secret garden of God a soul should sense upon it the gaze of some lurking spirit of evil which some way, somehow, had crept into the sanctuary and only bided its time to spring.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LEPRECHAWN.

THE shell carried us straight back to the house of Yolara. We stood again before the tenebrous wall where first we had faced the priestess and the Voice. And as we stood, again the portal appeared with all its disconcerting, magical abruptness; Rador drew aside; I entered; once more the entrance faded.

But now the scene was changed. Around the jet table were grouped a number of figures—Lugur, Yolara beside him; seven others—all of them fair-haired and all men save one who sat at the left of the priestess—an old, old woman, how old I could not tell, her face bearing traces of beauty that must once have been as great as Yolara's own, but now râvaged, in some way awesome; through its ruins the fearful, malicious gaiety shining out like a spirit of joy held within a corpse!

Larry was not present. I wondered why, but as I wondered he entered. He sent me a cheerful grin, and Yolara darted a glance at him that was—revelant. Lugur saw it, too, and read it aright, for his face darkened. Began then our examination, for such it was. And as it progressed I was more and more struck by the change in the

O'Keefe. All flippancy was gone, rarely did his sense of humor reveal itself in any of his answers. He was like a cautious swordsman, fencing, guarding, studying his opponent; or rather, like a chess-player who keeps sensing some far-reaching purpose in the game; alert, contained, watchful. Always he stressed the power of our surface races, their multitudes, their solidarity.

Their questions were myriad. What were our occupations? Our system of government? How great were the waters? The land? Intensely interested were they in the world war, querying minutely into its causes; its possible outcome. Lugur was curiously silent, but at some of our answers I caught his sneer and saw behind it—Von Hetzdorp! In our weapons their interest was avid. And they were exceedingly minute in their examination of us as to the ruins which had excited our curiosity; their position and surroundings—and if others than ourselves might be expected to find and pass through their entrance!

At this I shot a glance at Lugur. He did not seem unduly interested. I wondered if the German had told him as yet of the girl of the rosy wall of the Moon Pool Chamber and the real reasons for our search. Then I answered as briefly as possible—omitting all reference to these things. The red dwarf watched me with unmistakable amusement—and I knew Von Hetzdorp *had* told him. But clearly Lugur had kept his information even from Yolara; and as clearly she had spoken to none of that episode when O'Keefe's automatic had shattered the *Keth*-smitten vase. And again I felt that sense of deep bewilderment—of helpless search for clue to all the tangle.

For two hours we were questioned and then the priestess called Rador and let us go.

Larry was somber as we returned. Rador soon left us.

"One thing's sure," Larry remarked, almost inconsequentially, "we've got to beat Von Hetzdorp to it. Didn't see anything of a lady named Lakla in your trip around the bazaars, did you?"

I shook my head. He walked about the room, uneasily.

"Hell's brewing here all right," he said at last, stopping before me. "I can't make out just the particular brand—that's all that bothers me. We're going to have a stiff fight, that's sure. What I want to do quick is to find the Golden Girl, Doc. Haven't seen her on the wall lately, have you?" he queried, hopefully fantastic.

"Laugh if you want to," he went on. "But she's our best bet. It's going to be a race between her and the O'Keefe banshee—but I put my money on her. I had a queer experience while I was in that garden, after you'd left." His voice grew solemn. "Did you ever see a leprechawn, Doc?" I shook my head again, as solemnly. "He's a little man in green," said Larry. "Oh, about as high as your knee. I saw one once—in Carntogher Woods. And as I sat there, half asleep, in Yolara's garden, the living spit of him stepped out from one of those bushes, twirling a little shillalah.

"'It's a tight box ye're gettin' in, Larry avick,' said he, 'but don't ye be downhearted, lad.'

"'I'm carrying on,' said I, 'but you're a long way from Ireland,' I said, or thought I did.

"'Ye've a lot o' friends there,' he answered. 'An' where the heart rests the feet are swift to follow. Not that I'm sayin' I'd like to live here, Larry,' said he.

"'I know where my heart is now,' I told him. 'It rests on a girl with golden eyes and the hair and swan-white breast of Eilidh the Fair—but me feet don't seem to get me to her,' I said."

The brogue thickened.

"An' the little man in green nodded his head an' whirled his shillalah.

"'It's what I came to tell ye,' says he. 'Don't ye fall for the *Bhean-Nimher*, the serpent woman wit' the blue eyes; she's a daughter of Ivor, lad—an' don't ye do nothin' to make the brown-haired colleen ashamed o' ye, Larry O'Keefe. I knew yer great, great grandfather an' his before him, aroon,' says he, 'an' wan o' the O'Keefe failin's is to think their hearts big enough to hold all the wimmen o' the world. A heart's built to hold only wan permanently, Larry,' he says, 'an' I'm warnin' ye a nice girl don't like to move into a place all cluttered up wid another's washin' an'

mendin' an' cookin' an' other things pertainin' to general wife work. Not that I think the blue-eyed wan is keen for mendin' an' cookin'!' says he.

"'You don't have to be comin' all this way to tell me that,' I answer.

"'Well, I'm just a tellin' you,' he says. 'Ye've got some rough knocks comin', Larry. In fact ye're in for a very devil of a time. But, remember that ye're the O'Keefe,' says he. 'An' while the bhoys are all wid ye, avick, ye've got to be on the job yourself.'

"'I hope,' I tell him, 'that the O'Keefe banshee can find her way here in time—that is, if it's necessary, which I hope it won't be.'

"'Don't ye worry about that,' says he. 'Not that she's keen on leavin' the ould sod, Larry. The good ould soul's in quite a state o' mind about ye, aroon. I don't mind tellin' ye, lad, that she's mobilizin' all the clan an' if she *has* to come for ye, avick, they'll be wid her an' they'll sweep this joint clean before ye go. What they'll do to it 'll make the Big Wind look like a summer breeze on Lough Lene! An' that's about all Larry. We thought a voice from the green isle would cheer ye. Don't fergit that ye're the O'Keefe—an' I say it agin—all the bhoys are wid ye. But we want t' kape bein' proud o' ye, lad!'

"An' I looked again and there was only a bush waving."

There wasn't a smile in my heart—or if there was it was a very tender one. Subconscious visions, or whatever it had been, he meant every word, and I was curiously touched.

"Lord, I'd like to have a cigarette," he said. "Spill me a little scientific dope, old dear. What is this place, anyway?"

"Well," I said. "I think it's the matrix of the moon."

"The what!" he exclaimed, with almost ludicrous amazement. I told him of Von Hetzdorp's suggestion and my ideas upon it, as I have related them, somewhat fragmentarily, in another chapter.

"Any real evidence for that?" he asked. I assured him that there was.

"That," I continued, "would explain these enormous, caverned spaces—scar tissue of the world, permeated with gigantic spaces as human scar tissue is often permeated with lesions beneath the scarified surface. Now these people we have encountered are undoubtedly, as poor Throckmartin divined, the remnants of that lost and ancient race that built the Nan-Matal and similar Pacific structures. Undoubtedly they were forced below as their continent subsided. And here the green dwarf's statement that they made their way here 'where was the Shining One and where others before us had been' is highly suggestive."

"Odd lads, those dwarfs," said Larry. "They look like folk who started out to be gods and somebody's hand pushed them down while they were still soft!"

The characterization was so apt I started.

"However—" said O'Keefe. "Pardon me, Doc. Go on—it just occurred to me."

"This race that they found," I went on, "or rather its remnants, its relics or only its monuments, must have been immeasureably more ancient even than they. Indeed, it is legitimate to doubt whether they had ever reached the surface of our planet. And while on this point I would call your attention to the fact that the legend that their most distant ancestors were born within and issued from deep earth caverns is no uncommon one, not only among primitive peoples, but others who once, at least, had a high culture.

"What happened here I cannot of course tell. It may be that a condition prevailed analogous to that of the Mayans and Aztecs. The Mayans were the great race of Central America. They developed a marvelous civilization; attained a high command of art and science, were unsurpassed—and are even to-day—as builders, were extraordinary astronomers and their calender is now one of the wonders of the scientific world.

"Pestilence and famine destroyed them. Down upon their last few survivors came the Aztecs, far, far lower in all knowledge. But they took what they found and upon it built that civilization so amazingly complex in its mingled wickedness and good, darkest barbarism and true enlightenment, that the Spaniards, under Cortez, wantonly annihilated."

He nodded.

"Just as the Aztecs picked up some, but not nearly all, of the art and science of the Mayans—so these may have done from that great people who preceded them here, Larry. That they knew nothing of the existence of the passage from the Chamber of the Moon Pool proves that they have lost much of the ancient knowledge—if, indeed, they ever possessed it.

On the other hand, Yolara, it was clear, knows of the sinister excursions of the Dweller into the outer world—"

"But knowing that, she must also know how the thing you saw comes out," he objected. "Besides, the place of the Moon Pool was clearly known to the builders of Nan-Tauach, who were, apparently, the forefathers of these."

"I admit that it is puzzling," I answered. "Still—neither Yolara nor Lugur *did* know. Perhaps the hidden road was made by the earliest of their buried kind, and the secret lost. Or it may be it was built by some of that race they found"—I had a flash of intuition—"to keep watch upon them and upon the Shining One, who may have escaped some way, somehow, their own control!"

Larry shook his head, perplexedly.

"There's some sort of scrap brewing all right," he observed. "Maybe you're right. What the devil are the 'Silent Ones'?—and where is that Golden Girl who led us—Lakla, the handmaiden." His eyes grew soft and far away.

"Ask rather where is Throckmartin and his—and where the wife of Olaf." I answered, a little bruskly.

"I'm going to bed," he said abruptly. "Keep an eye on the wall, Doc!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

"ALLONS, ENFANTS DE LA PATRIE!"

BETWEEN the seven sleeps that followed, Larry and I saw but little of each other. Yolara sought him more and more. Thrice we were called before the council; once we were at a great feast, whose splendors and surprises I can never forget. Largely I was in the company of Rador. Together we two passed the green barriers into the dwelling-place of the *ladala*.

And here I felt the atmosphere of hostility, of brooding calamity, stiffen into a definitely unpleasant reality. We went among them, but never could I force my mind through the armor of their patent hate for Rador, or at least, for what he represented.

They lived in homes—if homes the pavilions could be called—that were lesser replicas of those within the city. Those who supplied the necessities and luxuries of their rulers worked in what were, in a fashion, community houses of wood and stone.

They seemed provided with everything needful for life. But everywhere was an oppressiveness, a *gathering together* of hate, that was spiritual rather than material—as tangible as the latter and far, far more menacing!

"They do not like to dance with the Shining One," was Rador's constant and only reply to my efforts to find the cause.

Once I had concrete evidence of the mood. Glancing behind me, I saw a white, vengeful face peer from behind a tree-trunk, a hand lift, a shining dart speed from it straight toward Rador's back. Instinctively I thrust him aside. He turned upon me angrily. I pointed to where the little missile lay, still quivering, on the ground. He gripped my hand.

"That some day I will repay!" he said. I looked again at the thing. At its end was a tiny cone covered with a glistening, gelatinous substance.

Rador pulled from a tree beside us a fruit somewhat like an apple.

"Look!" he said. He dropped it upon the dart—and at once, before my eyes, in less than ten seconds, the fruit had rotted away!

"That's what would have happened to Rador but for you, friend!" he said.

Still another curious incident I must record here. I had been commenting upon the scarcity of bird-life. The only avian species I had seen so far had been a few gaily colored, tiny, songless creatures. I mentioned, unthinkingly, the golden-eyed

bird that had greeted us. He gave evidence of perturbation indeed at this. He asked where we had seen it. On guard again, I told him that it had appeared when we emerged from the cliff.

"Tell that not to Yolara, nor to Lugur! And warn *Larree*," he said, earnestly.

I asked why. He shook his head. And then, softly, his thoughts clearly finding unconscious vent in words.

"Have the Silent Ones still the power—even as *she* says? Is the old wisdom yet strong? Almost do I believe — and it comes to me that I would be glad to believe—and what said Songar? That these strangers—"

He broke off and once more fell into silence.

I cite these two happenings for the light they cast upon that which I have still to tell.

Come now between this and the prelude to the latter half of the tremendous drama whose history this narrative is—interlude, rather, between what has gone before and the second curtain soon to rise so amazingly—only scattering and necessarily fragmentary observations.

First—the nature of the ebon opacities, blocking out the spaces between the pavilion-pillars or covering their tops like roofs. These were magnetic fields, light absorbers, negativing the vibrations of radiance; literally screens of electric force which formed as impervious a barrier to light as would have screens of steel.

They instantaneously made night appear in a place where no night was. But they interposed no obstacle to air or to sound. They were extremely simple in their inception—no more miraculous than is glass, which, inversely, admits the vibrations of light, but shuts out those coarser ones we call—air—and, partly, those others which produce upon our auditory nerves the effects we call sound.

Briefly, their mechanism was this:

[For the same reason that Dr. Goodwin's exposition of the mechanism of the atomic engines was deleted, his description of the light-destroying screens has been omitted by the Executive Council. The benefits of such a discovery to the armed forces still in the field are obvious. Added to this danger is the amazing simplicity of their construction. It can be confidently predicted that these screens will shortly be in use on the seas as protection against submarines and as cover for infantry attacks on land by Allied forces.—J. B. K., President, I. A. of S.]

There were two favored classes of the *ladala*—the soldiers and the dream-makers. The dream-makers were the most astonishing social phenomena, I think, of all. Denied by their circumscribed environment the wider experiences of us of the outer world, the Murians had perfected an amazing system of escape through the imagination.

The dream-makers were recruited from the *ladala*, and must have been extremely powerful—far more so than the vulgar fortune-tellers of earth, because to a certain extent the sleep visions they induced were their own—or were they?

At any rate, they led a precarious life, because if their patrons were annoyed by unpleasant sleep experiences they suffered for it either by death or by cruel beatings. At the one feast I attended I saw them summoned to the side of half-drunken women and men to ply their mysterious profession.

And before the sixth sleep I myself was induced by Rador to call upon one. I remember slipping straight out of this consciousness straight into another—visions of a young world—nightmare figures—steaming jungles—monsters—a bestial shaggy woman beast whom I, also a beast, loved brutally. But enough!

They were intensely musical. Their favorite instruments were double flutes; immensely complex pipe-organs; harps, great and small. They had another remarkable instrument made up of a double octave of small drums which gave forth percussions remarkably disturbing to the emotional centers.

Their development of music was, indeed, as decadent—if that be the right word to use—as the activities of the dream-makers. They were—I quote an extraordinary phrase of O'Keefe's—"jazz-jag hounds!"

It was this love of music that gave rise to one of the few truly humorous incidents of our caverned life. Larry came to me—

it was just after our fourth sleep, I remember.

"Come on to a concert," he said.

We skimmed off to one of the bridge garrisons. Rador called the twoscore guards to attention; and then, to my utter stupefaction, the whole company, O'Keefe leading them, roared out the "Marseillaise." "*Allons, enfants de la patrie!*" they sang—in a closer approach to the French than might have been expected ten or fifty miles below France level. "*Marchons! Marchons!*" they bellowed.

Larry quivered with suppressed mirth at my paralysis of surprise.

"Taught 'em that for Von Hetzdorp's benefit!" he gasped. "Wait till that boche hears it. He'll blow up. I've got 'em going on 'Tipperary' and that great Yank trench-song:

"Here come the doughboys,
The dirt behind their ears;
Here come the doughboys,
Their pay is in arrears."

And the dwarfs joined in rousingly, following the words as closely as they could. It was irresistibly funny; and in my laughter I forgot for the moment my forebodings.

"Just wait until you hear Yolara lisp a pretty little thing I taught her," said Larry as we set back for what we now called home. There was an impish twinkle in his eyes.

And I did hear. For it was not many minutes after that the priestess condescended to command me to come to her with O'Keefe.

"Show Goodwin how much you have learned of our speech, O lady of the lips of honeyed flame!" murmured Larry.

She hesitated; smiled at him, and then from that perfect mouth, out of the exquisite throat, in the voice that was like the chiming of little silver bells, she trilled a melody familiar to me indeed:

"She's only a bird in a gilded cage,
A bee-yu-tiful sight to see—"

And so on to the bitter end. I did not dare to look at O'Keefe; with utmost difficulty I controlled the spasm that shook me.

"She thinks it's a love-song," said Larry when we had left. "It's only part of a repertoire I'm teaching her. Honestly, Doc, it's the only way I can keep my mind clear when I'm with her," he went on earnestly. "She's a devil-ess from hell—but a wonder. Whenever I find myself going I get her to sing that, or 'Take back your gold!' and I'm back again—*pronto*—with the right perspective! *Pop* goes all the mystery! 'Hell!' I say, 'she's only a woman!'"

Through those seven sleeps there was no sign either of Olaf or of Von Hetzdorp. Always, when we asked Yolara, she said that they were both well and content. Nor was there sign of the Golden Girl—although Larry told me that he dreamed of her, and sometimes I turned quickly, feeling her eyes upon me.

And ever the passion light in the eyes of the priestess grew stronger, more perilous, when she looked upon Larry O'Keefe—and steadily the face of Lugur grew more forbidding.

Then at last came the summons to that tragic interlude which was to be the curtain-raiser to the dread, the incredible, the glorious finale of our adventure.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE AMPHITHEATER OF HELL.

FOR hours the black-haired folk had been streaming across the bridges, flowing along the promenade by scores and by hundreds, drifting down toward the gigantic seven-terraced temple whose interior I had never as yet seen, and from whose towering exterior, indeed, I had always been kept far enough away—unobtrusively, but none the less decisively—to prevent any real observation. The structure, I had estimated, nevertheless, could not reach less than a thousand feet above its silvery base, and the diameter of its circular foundation was about the same.

I wondered what it was that was bringing the *ladala* into Lora, and where were they vanishing. All of them were flower-crowned with the luminous, lovely blooms—old and young, slender, mocking-eyed girls, dwarfed

youths, mothers with their babes, gnomed oldsters—on they poured, silent for the most part and sullen—a sullenness that held acid bitterness even as their subtle, half-sinister, half-gay malice seemed tempered into little keen-edged flames, oddly, menacingly defiant.

There were many of the green-clad soldiers along the way, and the garrison of the only bridge span I could see had certainly been doubled.

Wondering still, I turned from my point of observation and made my way back to our pavilion, hoping that Larry, who had been with Yolara for the past two hours, had returned. Hardly had I reached it before Rador came hurrying up, in his manner a curious exultance, mingled with what in any one else I would have called a decided nervousness.

"Come!" he commanded before I could speak. "The council has made decision—and *Larree* is awaiting you."

"What has been decided?" I panted as we sped along the mosaicked path that led to the house of Yolara. "And why is Larry awaiting me?"

And at his answer I felt my heart pause in its beat and through me race a wave of mingled panic and eagerness; panic born of the memory of that which I had seen in the cabin of the Southern Queen, and eagerness that what I had set forth to seek I was at last to find.

"The Shining One dances!" had answered the green dwarf. "And you are to worship!

"Lugur was against it," he whispered as we went swiftly on. "The Shining One's Voice said 'No,' but the Shining One's priestess said 'Yes'; and the council thought at last, and as usual, as she did. What the Shining One may think, friend Goodwin, I do not know"—he shot a mocking glance at me—"but Yolara with you, there is no fear that *you* will join the dance," he added hastily, and obviously with reassuring intention.

What was this dancing of the Shining One, of which so often he had spoken? And in it, what was there for us of the deadly, inexplicable danger that had blasted Throckmartin and his and destroyed the wife and child of Olaf? Would we meet at this ceremony, whatever it was, those I had come here to find?

Whatever my forebodings, Larry evidently had none.

"Great stuff!" he cried, when we had met in the great antechamber, now empty of the dwarfs. "We're invited to the show—reserved seats and all the rest of it. Hope it will be worth seeing—have to be something damned good, though, to catch me, after what I've seen of shows at the front," he added.

And remembering, with a little shock of apprehension, that he had no knowledge of the Dweller beyond my poor description of it—for there are no words actually to describe what that miracle of interwoven glory and horror was—I wondered what Larry O'Keefe would say and do when he did behold it!

Rador began to show impatience.

"Come!" he urged. "There is much to be done—and the time grows short!"

He led us to a tiny fountain room, in whose miniature pool the white waters were concentrated, pearl-like and opalescent in their circling rim.

"Bathe!" he commanded; and set the example by stripping himself and plunging within. We followed. I experienced the peculiar stimulation that these waters always gave. They seemed to sparkle through every nerve and muscle. Only a minute or two did the green dwarf allow us, and he checked us as we were about to don our clothing—and let me note that we had long been provided with all necessary garments to replace our own. And I would, indeed, gladly have donned the outer costume of the place, save that Larry had clung to his uniform; and so I kept also to my knickerbockers, my stockings, and my canvas shoes, compromising, however, with a Murian tunic above them in the place of my American shirt.

Then, to my intense embarrassment, without warning, two of the black-haired girls entered, bearing robes of a peculiar dull-blue hue. At our manifest discomfort Rador's bellow of laughter roared out. He took the garments from the pair, motioned them to leave us, and, still laughing, threw

one around me. Its texture was soft, but decidedly metallic—like some blue metal spun to the fineness of a spider's thread. The garment buckled tightly at the throat, was girdled at the waist, and, below this cincture, fell to the floor, its folds being held together by a half-dozen looped cords; from the shoulders a hood resembling a monk's cowl.

Rador cast this over my head; it completely covered my face, but was of so transparent a texture that I could see, though somewhat mistily, through it. Finally he handed us both a pair of long gloves of the same material and high stockings, the feet of which were gloved—five-toed.

And again his laughter rang out at our manifest surprise.

"The priestess of the Shining One does not altogether trust the Shining One's Voice," he said at last. "And these are to guard against any sudden—errors. And fear not, Goodwin," he went on kindly. "Not for the Shining One itself would Yolara see harm come to *Larree* here—nor, because of him, to you. But I would not stake much on her heart toward the Double Tongue whom Lugur has claimed—nor to the great white one. And for the last I am sorry, for him I do like well."

"Are they to be with us?" asked Larry eagerly.

"They are to be where we go," replied the dwarf soberly. "For Double Tongue there is no more peril than for you—Lugur stands with him—but for the other—"

He was silent. Grimly Larry reached down and drew from his uniform his automatic. He popped a fresh clip into the pocket fold of his girdle. The pistol he slung high up beneath his arm-pit. Now O'Keefe had cautioned me against revealing my weapon, and had, up till now, kept his own concealed.

"When we do need 'em, we're certain to have a bunch of odds against us, Doc," he had said. "And the element of surprise will be mighty valuable to us. Keep 'em under cover till we have to use 'em; then shoot straight!"

Therefore I wondered why Larry was showing his hand. The green dwarf looked at the weapon curiously. O'Keefe tapped it, and as he spoke I understood.

"Listen, Rador," he said. "I like you, and I believe you like us."

The dwarf nodded emphatically.

"This," said Larry, "slays quicker than the *Keth*—I take it so no harm shall come to the blue-eyed one whose name is Olaf. If I should raise it—be you not in its way, Rador!" he added significantly.

The dwarf nodded again, his eyes sparkling. He thrust a hand out to both of us.

"A change comes," he said. "What it is I know not, nor how it will fall. But this remember—Rador is more friend to you than you yet can know. And now let us go!" he ended abruptly.

He led us, not through the entrance, but into a sloping passage ending in a blind wall; touched a symbol graven there, and it opened, precisely as had the rosy barrier of the Moon Pool Chamber. And, just as there, but far smaller, was a passage end, a low curved wall facing a shaft, not black as had been that abode of living darkness, but faintly luminescent. Rador leaned over the wall.

O'Keefe winked at me. The mechanism clicked and started; the door swung shut; the sides of the car slipped into place, and we swept swiftly down the passage; overhead the wind whistled; Rador turned toward us.

"Have no fear—" he began, and then, for the green dwarf was keen, was aware without doubt of our lack of surprise. He started again to speak—shrugged his shoulders, and turned his back. Our speed was great and the journey not long. In a few moments the moving platform began to slow down. It stopped in a closed chamber no larger than itself.

Rador scanned the wall before him, and then, finding what he sought, although I could see nothing on its smooth surface, drew his poniard and struck twice with its hilt. Immediately a panel moved away, revealing a space filled with faint, misty blue radiance. And at each side of the opened portal stood four of the dwarfish men, gray-headed, old, clad in a flowing garment of white; each pointing toward us a short silver rod.

Rador drew from his girdle a ring and held it out to the first dwarf. He examined it, lowered his rod, handed it to the one beside him, and not until each had examined the ring did each lower his curious weapon; containers of that terrific energy they called the *Keth*, I thought; and later was to know that I had been right.

We stepped out; the doors closed behind us. The place was weird enough. Its pave was a greenish-blue stone resembling lapis lazuli. On each side were high pedestals holding carved figures of the same material. There were perhaps a score of these, but in the mistiness I could not make out their outlines. A droning, rushing roar beat upon our ears; filled the whole cavern.

"I smell the sea," said Larry suddenly.

And then I, too, realized that the tang of ocean was strong. I felt its moisture upon my face and hands. Rador spoke again to the leader of—the priests—as I now began to think them. Four leading the way and four following us, we marched forward. The floor arose gradually, and the rushing roar grew louder, the sea breath stronger.

And now the roaring became deep-toned, clamorous, and close in front of us a rift opened. Twenty feet in width, it cut the cavern floor and vanished into the blue mist on each side. The priests leading us knelt, Rador imitating them; O'Keefe nudged me, and we, too, dropped to our knees. We arose and went forward. Before us the cleft was spanned by one solid slab of rock not more than two yards wide. It had neither railing nor other protection.

The four leading priests marched out upon it one by one, and we followed. In the middle of the span they stopped and again we knelt. Ten feet beneath us was a torrent of blue sea-water racing with prodigious speed between polished walls. It gave the impression of vast depth. It roared as it sped by, and far to the right was a low arch through which it disappeared. It was so swift that its surface shone like polished blue steel, and from it came the blessed, *our worldly*, familiar ocean breath that strengthened my soul amazingly and made me realize how earth-sick I was. Larry, too, drew himself up, drawing deep breaths. Rador uttered a curious phrase—it loses in translation its peculiar picturesqueness.

"The Holy Cord of the Naval of the Great Waters!" is the closest I can come to it.

Whence came the stream, I marveled, forgetting for the moment as we passed on again, all else. Were we closer to the surface of earth than I had thought, or was this some mighty stream falling through an opening in sea floor, Heaven alone knew how many miles above us, losing itself in deeper abysses beyond these? How near and how far this was from the truth I was to learn—and never did truth come to man in more dreadful guise!

The roaring fell away, the blue haze lessened. In front of us stretched a wide flight of steps, huge as those which had let us into the courtyard of Nan-Tauach through the ruined sea-gate. We scaled it; it narrowed; from above light poured through a still narrower opening. Side by side Larry and I passed out of it.

How can I describe what I saw? Two things there are before which I falter—to picture that temple of the Shining One as it first met our eyes in all its incredible immensity, and what happened there; and that thing to come to pass, that twilight of the gods, in the abode of the Silent Ones on the Sea of Crimson. But I must attempt it, knowing full well that it is impossible to make clear one-tenth of their grandeur, their awfulness, their soul-shaking terror.

We had emerged upon an enormous platform of what seemed to be glistening ivory. It stretched before us for a hundred yards or more and then shelved gently into the white waters. Opposite—not a mile away—was that prodigious web of woven rainbows Rador had called the curtain of the Shining One. There it shone in all its unearthly grandeur, on each side of the Cyclopean pillars, as though a mountain should stretch up arms raising between them a fairy banner of auroral glories—in front the curved, simitar sweep of the pier with its clustered, gleaming temples.

Before that brief, fascinated glance was done, there dropped upon my soul a sensa-

tion as of brooding weight intolerable; a spiritual oppression as though some vastness was falling, pressing, stifling me. I turned—and Larry caught me as I reeled.

"Steady! Steady, old man!" he whispered.

At first all that my staggering consciousness could realize was an immensity, an immeasurable uprearing, that brought with it the same throat-gripping vertigo as comes from gazing downward from some great height—then a blur of white faces—intolerable shinings of hundreds upon thousands of eyes—huge, incredibly huge, a colossal amphitheater of jet, a stupendous semicircle held within its mighty arc the ivory platform on which I stood.

It reared itself almost perpendicularly hundreds of feet up into the sparkling heavens, and thrust down on each side its ebon bulwarks—like monstrous paws. Now, the giddiness from its sheer greatness passing, I saw that it was indeed an amphitheater, sloping slightly backward tier after tier, and that the white blur of faces against its blackness, the gleaming of countless eyes, were those of myriads of the people who sat silent, flower-garlanded, their gaze focused upon the rainbow curtain and sweeping over me like a torrent—tangible, appalling!

Five hundred feet beyond, the smooth, high retaining wall of the amphitheater raised itself—above it the first terrace of the seats, and above this, dividing the tiers for another half a thousand feet upward, set within them like a panel, was a dead-black surface in which shone faintly with a bluish radiance a gigantic disk; above it and around it a cluster of innumerable smaller ones.

On each side of me, bordering the platform, were scores of small pillared alcoves; a low wall stretching across their fronts; delicate, fretted grills shielding them, save where in each lattice an opening stared—it came to me that they were like those stalls in ancient Gothic cathedrals wherein for centuries had kneeled paladins and people of my own race on earth's fair face. And within these alcoves were gathered, score upon score, the elfin beauties, the dwarfish men, of the fair-haired folk. At my right, a few feet from the opening through which we had come, a passageway led back between the fretted stalls. Halfway between us and the massive base of the amphitheater a dais rose. Up the platform to it a wide ramp ascended; and on ramp and dais and along the center of the gleaming platform down to where it kissed the white waters, a broad ribbon of the radiant flowers lay like a fairy carpet.

On one side of this dais, meshed in a silken web that hid no line or curve of her sweet body, white flesh gleaming through its folds, stood Yolara; and opposite her, crowned with a circlet of flashing blue stones, his mighty body stark bare, was Lugur!

O'Keefe drew a long breath; Rador touched my arm and, still dazed, I let myself be drawn into the aisle and through a corridor that ran behind the alcoves. At the back of one of these the green dwarf paused, opened a door, and motioned us within.

Entering, I found that we were exactly opposite where the ramp ran up to the dais—and that Yolara was not more than fifty feet away. She glanced at O'Keefe and smiled. I noted her extraordinary exhilaration—her eyes ablaze with little dancing points of light; her body that seemed to palpitate, the rounded delicate muscles beneath the translucent skin to run with little eager waves; she seemed—what is the word the Scotch use?—fey! Suddenly Larry whistled softly.

"There's Von Hetzdorp!" he said.

I looked where he pointed. Opposite us sat the German; clothed as we were, leaning forward, his eyes eager behind his glasses; but if he saw us he gave no sign.

"And there's Olaf!" said O'Keefe.

Beneath the carved stall in which sat the German was an aperture. Unprotected by pillars, or by grills, opening clear upon the platform, near it stretched the trail of flowers up to the great dais which Lugur the Voice and Yolara the Priestess guarded. Nor was Olaf clad as we. His mighty torso covered with a white tunic stuffed into his old dungarees, his feet bare, he sat immobile, staring out toward the prismatic veil, and in his eyes, even at that distance, I

could see a flare of consuming hatred. So he sat alone, and my heart went out to him.

O'Keefe's face softened.

"Bring him here," he said to Rador.

The green dwarf was looking at the Norseman, too, a shade of pity upon his mocking face. He shook his head.

"Wait!" he said. "You can do nothing now—and it may be there will be no need to do anything," he added; but I could feel that there was little of conviction in his words.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MADNESS OF OLAF.

YOLARA drew herself up; threw her white arms high. From the mountainous tiers came a mighty sigh; a ripple ran through them. And upon the moment, before Yolara's arms fell, there issued, apparently from the air around us, a peal of sound that might have been the shouting of some playful god hurling great suns through the net of stars. It was like the deepest notes of all the organs in the world combined in one; summoning, majestic, cosmic!

It held within it the thunder of the spheres rolling through the infinite, the birth-song of suns made manifest in the womb of space; echoes of creation's supernal chord! It shook the body like a pulse from the heart of the universe—pulsed—and died away.

On its death came a blaring as of all the trumpets of conquering hosts since the first Pharaoh led his swarms—triumphal, compelling! Alexander's clamoring hosts, brazen-throated wolf-horns of Cæsar's legions, blare of trumpets of Genghis Khan and his golden horde, clangor of the locust levies of Tamerlane, bugles of Napoleon's armies—war-shout of all earth's conquerors! And it died!

Fast upon it, a throbbing, muffled tumult of harp sounds, mellownesses of myriads of wood horns, the subdued sweet shrilling of multitudes of flutes, Pandean pipings—inviting, carrying with them the calling of waterfalls in the hidden places, rushing brooks and murmuring forest winds—calling, calling, languorous, lulling, dripping into the brain like the very honeyed essence of sound.

And after them a silence in which the memory of the music seemed to beat, to beat, ever more faintly, through every quivering nerve.

From me all fear, all apprehension, had fled. In their place was nothing but joyous anticipation, a supernal freedom from even the shadow of the shadow of care or sorrow; not now did anything matter—Olaf or his haunted, hate-filled eyes; Throckmartin or his fate—nothing of pain, nothing of agony, nothing of striving nor endeavor nor despair in that wide outer world that had turned suddenly to a troubled dream.

And in that moment, as the muscles of my face grew rigid with inhuman emotion, in my subconsciousness stirred understanding of that element in the Murians that had so perplexed me—for what to those who experienced in such sounds the emotions of universal Nature herself could be either the joys or sorrows of mankind? And yet—

My eyes sought the crowded tiers, sensing there in multitudinous form the same reaction of those stupendous vibrations that had so shaken me—and yet—again that furtive doubt—

Once more the first great note pealed out! As once more it died, from the clustered spheres a kaleidoscopic blaze shot as though drawn from the majestic sound itself. The many-colored rays darted across the white waters and sought the face of the irised veil. As they touched, it sparkled, flamed, wavered, and shook with fountains of prismatic color.

The light increased—and in its intensity the silver air darkened. Faded into shadow that white mosaic of flower-crowned faces set in the amphitheater of jet, and vast shadows dropped upon the high-hung tiers and shrouded them. But on the skirts of the rays the fretted stalls in which we sat with the fair-haired ones blazed out, iridescent, like jewels.

I was sensible of an acceleration of every pulse; a wild stimulation of every nerve. I felt myself being lifted above the world

—close to the threshold of the high gods—soon their essence and their power would stream out into me! I glanced at Larry. His face was transformed—he was like Balder the Beautiful—wonderful as one of those olden half gods of his own beloved isle! His eyes were—wild—with life! And Yolara—I cannot describe her—but as her face turned toward his I saw in the joy of her own eyes infernal allure and a passion withering.

I looked at Olaf—and in his face was none of this—only hate, and hate, and hate.

The peacock waves streamed out over the waters, cleaving the seeming darkness, a rainbow path of glory. And the veil flashed as though all the rainbows that had ever shone were burning within it. Again the mighty sound pealed.

Into the center of the veil the light drew itself, grew into an intolerable brightness—and with a storm of tinklings, a tempest of crystalline notes, a tumult of tiny chimings, through it sped—the Shining One!

Straight down that radiant path, its high-flung plumes of feathery flame shimmering, its coruscating spirals whirling, its seven globes of seven colors shining above its glowing core, it raced toward us. The hurricane of bells of diamond glass were jubilant, joyous. I felt O'Keefe grip my arm; Yolara threw her white arms out in a welcoming gesture; I heard from the tiers a sigh of rapture—and in it a poignant, wailing undertone of agony!

And over the waters, down the light stream, to the end of the ivory pier, flew the Shining One. Through its crystal pizzicati drifted inarticulate murmurings—deadly sweet, stilling the heart and setting it leaping madly.

For a moment it paused, poised itself, and then came whirling down the flower path to its priestess, slowly, ever more slowly. It passed Olaf—and I saw his hands clench until the knuckles whitened; saw his mighty chest swell with the terrific restrained impulse to leap out upon it!

It passed—hovered for a moment between the woman and the dwarf, as though contemplating them; turned to her with its storm of tinklings softened, its murmurings infinitely caressing. Bent toward it, Yolara seemed to gather within herself pulsing waves of power; she was terrifying; gloriously, maddeningly evil; and as gloriously, maddeningly heavenly! Aphrodite and the Virgin! Tanith of the Carthaginians and St. Bride of the Isles! Succubus and Angel! A queen of hell and a princess of heaven—in one!

Only for a moment did that which we had called the Dweller and that these named the Shining One, pause. It swept up the ramp to the dais, rested there, slowly turning, plumes and spirals lacing and unlacing, throbbing, pulsing. Now its nucleus grew plainer, stronger—human in a fashion, and all inhuman; neither man nor woman; neither god nor devil; subtly partaking of all. Nor could I doubt that whatever it was, within that shining nucleus was something sentient; something that had will and energy, and in some awful, supernormal fashion—intelligence!

Another trumpeting—a sound of stones opening—a long, low wail of utter anguish—something moved shadowy in the river of light, and slowly at first, then ever more rapidly, shapes swam through it. There were half a score of them—girls and youths, women and men. And I knew that these were sacrifices thrust out to the god. As they drew on, the Shining One poised itself, regarded them. They drew closer, and in the eyes of each and in their faces was the bud of that strange intermingling of emotions, of joy and sorrow, ecstasy and terror, that I had seen in full blossom on Throckmartin's.

The Thing began again its murmurings—now infinitely caressing, coaxing—like the song of a siren from some witched star! And the bell sounds rang out—compellingly, calling—calling—calling—

I saw Olaf lean far out of his place; saw, half-consciously, at Lugur's signal, three of the dwarfs creep in and take place, unnoticed, behind him. But in the fire of my interest the sight was burned instantaneously from my mind.

Now the first of the swift figures rushed upon the dais—and paused. But only for a moment. It was the girl who had been brought before Yolara, when the gnome named Sangar was driven into the nothing-

ness! With all the quickness of light a spiral of the Shining One stretched out and encircled her.

At its touch there was an infinitely dreadful shrinking and, it seemed, a simultaneous hurling of herself into its radiance. And as it wrapped its swirls around her, permeated her—the crystal chorus burst forth—tumultuously; through and through her the radiance pulsed. Began then that infinitely dreadful, but infinitely glorious, rhythm they called the dance of the Shining One. And as the girl swirled within its sparkling mists, another and another flew into its embrace, until, at last, the dais was an incredible vision; a mad star's Witches' Sabbath, *phantasmagorie Macaberesque;* an altar of white faces and bodies gleaming through living flame; transfused with rapture insupportable and horror that was hellish—and ever, radiant plumes and spirals expanding, the core of the Shining One waxed—growing greater—as it consumed, as it drew into and through itself the life-force of these lost ones!

So they spun there, interlaced, souls caught in the monstrous web—and there began to pulse from them life, vitality, as though the very essence of nature was filling us. Dimly I recognized that what I was beholding was vampirism inconceivable! The banked tiers chanted. The mighty sounds pealed forth!—it was a Saturnalia of demigods—Yolara transformed beyond semblance of earth—her beauty flaring out into unholy and devilish, and at once holy and wondrous fulfilment impossible to tell—

Whirling, murmuring, bell-notes storming, the Shining One began to pass from the dais down the ramp, still embracing, still interwoven with those who had thrown themselves into its spirals. They drew along with it as though half carried; in dreadful dance; white faces sealed—forever—into that semblance of those who held within linked God and devil—I covered my eyes!

And the Shining One passed—passed on—was beside Olaf—

I heard a gasp from O'Keefe; opened my eyes and sought his; saw the madness depart from them as he strained forward. Olaf had leaned far out, and as he did so two of the dwarfs beside him caught him, and whether by design or through his own swift, involuntary movement, thrust him half into the Dweller's path. The Dweller paused in its gyrations—seemed to watch him. The Norseman's face was crimson, his eyes blazing. He threw himself back and, with one mad, defiant shout, gripped one of the dwarfs about the middle and sent him hurtling through the air, straight at the radiant thing! A whirling mass of legs and arms, the dwarf flew—then in midflight stopped as though some gigantic invisible hand had caught him, and—was dashed—it came to me as one would dash a great spider, with prodigious force, down upon the platform not a yard from the Shining One!

And like a broken spider he moved—feebly—once, twice. From the Dweller shot a shimmering tentacle—touched him—recoiled. Its crystal tinklings changed into an angry chiming. From all about—jeweled stalls and jet peak—came a sigh of incredulous horror.

And all the while those dead-alive, who had danced with the Shining One, turned slowly within its sparkling mist—faces devoid of all human semblance—turning, slowly turning, in its coruscating net—*chatoyant*—like fireflies in gleaming, swirling mist—God!

"God!" The echo of my invocation came from O'Keefe. "Olaf threw him short!" But I knew *that* was not what had stopped his flight!

Lugur, his face gray, all exaltation gone from it, leaped forward. On the instant Larry was over the low barrier between the pillars, rushing to the Norseman's side. And even as they ran there was another wild shout from Olaf, and he hurled himself out, straight at the throat of the Dweller!

But before he could touch the Shining One, now motionless—and never was the thing more horrible than then, with the purely human suggestion of surprise plain in its poise—Larry had struck him aside.

I tried to follow—and was held by Rador. He was trembling—but not with fear. In his face was incredulous hope, inexplicable eagerness.

"Wait!" he said. "Wait!"

The Shining One stretched out a slow spiral, and as it did so I saw the bravest thing man has ever witnessed. Instantly O'Keefe thrust himself between it and Olaf, pistol out. The tentacle touched him, and the dull blue of his robe flashed out into blinding, intense azure light. From the automatic in his gloved hand came three quick bursts of flame straight into the Thing. The Dweller drew back; the bell-sounds swelled angrily.

And all that time its prey, unheeding, white faces transfigured—turned—turned slowly on its radiant web—can I ever forget!

Then I saw Lugur pause—his hand darted up, and in it was one of the silver Keth cones. But before he could flash it upon the Norseman, Larry had unlooped his robe, thrown its fold over Olaf, and, holding him with one hand away from the Shining One, thrust with the other his pistol into the dwarf's stomach. His lips moved, but I could not hear what he said. But Lugur seemed to understand, for his hand dropped.

Now Yolara was there—all this had taken barely more than five seconds. She thrust herself between the three men and the apparition, of which she was priestess. She spoke to it—and the wild buzzing died down; the gay crystal tinklings burst forth again. The Thing murmured to her—began to whirl—faster, faster—passed down the ivory pier, out upon the waters, bearing with it, meshed in its light, the sacrifice—swept on ever more swiftly, triumphantly—and vanished; turning, turning, with its ghastly crew, through the Veil!

Abruptly the polychromatic path snapped out. The silver light poured in upon us. From all the amphitheater arose a clamor, a shouting. Von Hetzdorp, his eyes staring, was leaning out, listening. Unrestrained now by Rador, I vaulted the wall and rushed forward. But not before I had heard the green dwarf murmur:

"There is something stronger than the Shining One! Two things—yea—a strong heart—and hate!"

Olaf, panting, eyes glazed, trembling, shrank beneath my hand.

"The devil that took my Helma!" I heard him whisper. "The Shining Devil!"

"Both these men," Lugur was raging, "they shall dance with the Shining One. And this one, too." He pointed at me malignantly.

"This man is mine," said the priestess, and her voice was icily menacing. She rested her hand on Larry's shoulder. "He shall not dance. No—nor his friend. I have told you I care not for this one!" She pointed to Olaf.

"Neither this man, nor this," said Larry, his pistol still pressed against Lugur, "shall be harmed. This is my word, Yolara!"

She looked at him.

"Even so," she said quietly, "my lord!"

Lugur's eyes grew hellish, and I saw Von Hetzdorp stare at O'Keefe with a new and curiously speculative interest.

"I have said it!" She turned to Lugur. "What can you do?" she added quite insolently.

He raised his arms as though to strike her. Her hand swept to her bosom. Larry's pistol prodded him rudely enough.

"No rough stuff now, kid!" said O'Keefe in English. The red dwarf quivered, turned—caught a robe from a priest standing by, and threw it over himself. The *ladala*, shouting, gesticulating, fighting with the soldiers, were jostling down from the tiers of jet.

"Come!" commanded Yolara—her eyes rested upon Larry. "Your heart is great, indeed—my lord!" she murmured; and her voice was very sweet. "Come!"

"This man comes with us, Yolara," said O'Keefe, pointing to Olaf.

"Bring him," she said. "What you have done—and what may come from what you have done, I know not." She laughed. "But compared to what I think that will be—this man is but a straw in a torrent. So bring him—only tell him to look no more upon me as before!" she added fiercely.

Beside her the three of us passed along the stalls, where sat the fair-haired, now silent, at gaze, as though in the grip of some great doubt. Silently Olaf strode beside me. Rador had disappeared. Down the stairway, through the hall of turquoise

mist, over the rushing sea-stream we went and stood beside the wall through which we had entered. The white-robed ones had fled.

Yolara pressed; the portal opened. We stepped upon the car; Yolara took the lever; the walls flashed by—and dazed, troubled, I, at least, more than half-incredulous as to the reality of it all, we sped through the faintly luminous corridor to the house of the priestess.

And as we sped I, too, wondered what it was that Olaf had done—and what was to come of it.

But one thing I wondered about no more, sick at heart and soul the truth had come to me—no more need to search for Throckmartin. Behind that Veil, in the lair of the Dweller, dead-alive like those we had just seen swim in its shining train was he, and Edith, Stanton and Thora and Olaf Huldricksson's wife.

CHAPTER XXI.

"THE LADALA ARE AWAKE!"

NO word was spoken during the swift journey. The webs that clothed Yolara streamed out behind her like little filmy pennons; she stared ahead, strangely *exalté*, brows drawn in one delicate line above eyes now deepest blue. O'Keefe watched her, and from his beauty-loving soul one could see admiration creep up and stand at gaze. Upon Olaf's grim face a shade of greater grimness fell; his jaw hardened. Whatever Larry's change of heart might be, I thought, it found no echo in the Norseman's breast.

The car came to rest; the portal opened; Yolara leaped out lightly, beckoned and flitted up the corridor. She paused before an ebon screen. At a touch it vanished, revealing an entrance to a small blue chamber, glowing as though cut from the heart of some gigantic sapphire; bare, save that in its center, upon a low pedestal, stood a great globe fashioned from milky rock-crystal; upon its surface were faint tracings as of seas and continents, but, if so, either of some other world or of this world in immemorial past, for in no way did they resemble the mapped coast lines of our earth.

Poised upon the globe, rising from it out into space, locked in each other's arms, lips to lips, were two figures, a woman and a man, so exquisite, so lifelike, that for the moment I failed to realize that they, too, were carved of the crystal. And before this shrine—for nothing else could it be, I knew—three slender cones raised themselves: one of purest white flame, one of opalescent water, and the third of—moonlight! There was no mistaking them, the height of a tall man each stood—but how water, flame, and light were held so evenly, so steadily in their spire-shapes, I could not tell.

Before this shrine Yolara bowed lowly—once, twice, thrice. She turned to O'Keefe. Nor by slightest look or gesture betrayed she knew others were there than he. The blue eyes wide, searching, unfathomable, she drew close; put white hands on his shoulders, looked down into his very soul—and I saw a shadow dim their azure brillance.

"Not yet," she whispered. "Not yet—is your heart mine!" She was silent again for a space, regarding him.

"My lord," at last she murmured. "Now listen well—for I, Yolara, offer you three things—myself, and the Shining One, and the power that is the Shining One's—yea, and still a fourth thing that is all three—power over all upon that world from whence ye came! These, my lord, ye shall have. I swear it"—she turned toward the altar—uplifted her arms—"by Siya and by Siyana, and by the flame, by the water, and by the light!"

She bent toward him once more, drew still closer.

"Not yet is that heart of yours mine!" she repeated softly. "Yet shall it be! And that, too, I swear by Siya and by Siyana, and by the flame, by the water, and by the light!"

Her eyes grew purple dark. "And let none dare to take you from me! Nor ye go from me unbidden!" she whispered fiercely.

And then swiftly, still ignoring us, she threw her arms about O'Keefe, pressed her white body to his breast, lips raised, eyes

closed, seeking his. O'Keefe's arms tightened around her, his head dropped lips seeking, finding hers—passionately! From Olaf came a deep indrawn breath that was almost a groan. But not in *my* heart could I find blame for the Irishman!

The priestess opened eyes now all misty blue, thrust him back, stood regarding him. O'Keefe, face dead-white, raised a trembling hand to his face.

"And thus have I sealed my oath, O my lord!" she whispered. For the first time she seemed to recognize our presence, stared at us a moment, and then through us, turned to O'Keefe.

"Go, now!" she said. "Soon Rador shall come for you. Then—well, after that let happen what will!"

She smiled once more at him—so sweetly; turned toward the figures upon the great globe; sank upon her knees before them. Quietly we crept away; in utter silence we passed through the anteroom, still deserted; found the head of the mosaicked path, and, still silent, made our way to the little pavilion. But as we passed along we heard a tumult from the green roadway: shouts of men, now and then a woman's scream. Through a rift in the garden I glimpsed a jostling crowd on one of the bridges: green dwarfs struggling with the *ladala*—and all about droned a humming as of a giant hive disturbed!

Larry threw himself down upon one of the divans, covered his face with his hands, dropped them to catch in Olaf's eyes troubled reproach, looked at me.

"*I* couldn't help it," he said, half defiantly—half-miserably. "God, what a woman! I *couldn't* help it!" He walked about the room restlessly. "What do you suppose she meant by offering me that shining devil they worship in this cross-section of beautiful hell?" he demanded, halting. "And what did she mean about 'power over all the world'?"

"Larry," I said. "Why didn't you tell her you didn't love her—then?"

He gazed at me—the old twinkle back in his eye.

"Spoken like a scientist, Doc!" he exclaimed. "I suppose if a burning angel struck you out of nowhere and threw itself about you, you would most dignifiedly tell it you didn't want to be burned. For God's sake, don't talk nonsense, Goodwin!" he ended, almost peevishly.

"But if it was a bad angel—a beautiful devil—*djaevelsk*—and she should come to you—and you knew her a devil, and your soul the price of her kisses—would you kiss or slay her?" Thus Olaf, heavily, sadly. Larry glanced at him, troubled.

"Evil! Evil!" The Norseman's voice was deep, nearly a chant. "All here is of evil: Trolldom and Helvede it is, *Ja!* And that she *djaevelsk* of beauty—what is she but harlot of that shining devil they worship. I, Olaf Huldricksson, know what she meant when she held out to you power over all the world, *Ja!*—as if the world had not devils enough in it now!"

"What?" The cry came from both O'Keefe and myself at once.

"*Ja!*" said Olaf. "I have heard. I have listened to that Trolde Lugur and to Von Hetzdorp. They did not know I could understand them—no! I crept about and listened. And I know, *Ja!* Evil! All evil that woman—and Helvede snarling at these gates—mad to be loosed on our world above!"

"We'd better just forget why I kissed the lady and hear what Olaf's got to say, Doc," said O'Keefe.

"It was when the woman, the wonder-witch, broke — *adsprede* — the oldster—" began Olaf. He stopped, peering down the path—made a gesture of caution, relapsed into sullen silence. There were footsteps on the path, and into sight came Rador—but a Rador changed. Gone was every vestige of his mockery; his face all serious, curiously solemn, he saluted O'Keefe and Olaf with that salute which, before this, I had seen given only to Yolara and to Lugur. There came from far-away a swift quickening of the tumult—died away. He shrugged mighty shoulders.

"The *ladala* are awake!" he said. "So much for what two brave men can do!" He paused thoughtfully. "Bones and dust jostle not each other for place against the grave wall!" he added oddly. "But if bones and dust have revealed to them that they still—live—"

He stopped abruptly, eyes seeking the globe that bore and sent forth speech.*

"The *Afyo Maie* has sent me to watch over you till she summons you," he announced clearly. A vestige of raillery flitted over his face. "There is to be a—feast. You, *Larree*, you, Goodwin, are to come. I remain here with—Olaf."

"No harm to him!" broke in O'Keefe sharply. Rador touched his heart, his eyes.

"By the Ancient Ones, and by my love for you, and by what you twain did before the Shining One—I swear it!" he answered. O'Keefe, satisfied, thrust him his hand.

Rador clapped palms; a soldier came round the path, in his grip a long flat box of polished wood. The green dwarf took it, dismissed him, threw open the lid.

"Here is your apparel for the feast, *Larree*," he said, pointing to the contents.

O'Keefe stared, reached down and drew out a white, shimmering, softly metallic, long-sleeved tunic, a broad, silvery girdle, leg swathings of the same argent material, and sandals that seemed to be cut out from silver. He made a quick gesture of angry dissent.

"Nay, *Larree!*" whispered the dwarf. "Wear them—I counsel it—I pray it—ask me not why?" he went on swiftly, looking again at the globe.

O'Keefe, as I, was impressed by his earnestness. The dwarf made a curiously expressive pleading gesture. O'Keefe abruptly took the garments; passed into the room of the fountain.

"What is the feast, Rador?" I asked. "The Shining One dances not again?" I added.

"No," he said. "No"—he hesitated—"it is the usual feast that follows the—sacrament! Lugur—and Double Tongue, who came with you, will be there," he added slowly.

"Lugur—" I gasped in astonishment. "After what happened—he will be there?"

"Perhaps because of what happened, Goodwin, my friend," he answered—his eyes again full of malice; "and there will be others — friends of Yolara — friends of Lugur—and perhaps another"—his voice was almost inaudible—"one whom they have not called—" He halted, half-fearfully, glancing at the globe; put finger to lips and spread himself out upon one of the couches.

"Strike up the band"—came O'Keefe's voice—"here comes the hero!"

The curtains parted and he strode into the room. I am bound to say that the admiration in Rador's eyes was reflected in my own, and even, if involuntarily, in Olaf's. For in the gleaming silver garb the Irishman was truly splendid. Long, lithe, clean-limbed, his keen, dark face smiling, he shone in contrast with Rador, and would, I knew, be among those other dwarfish men as was Cuchullin, son of Lerg and beloved of the Dark Queen Scathach, among the Pictish trolls.

"A son of Siyana!" whispered Rador. "A child of Siya—" Who, I wondered, were these twain whose names had been uttered so holily by Yolara and now by the green dwarf—with far, far more reverence

* I find that I have neglected to explain the working of these interesting mechanisms that were telephonic, dictaphonic, telegraphic in one. I must assume that my readers are familiar with the receiving apparatus of wireless telegraphy, which must be "tuned" by the operator until its own vibratory quality is in exact harmony with the vibrations—the extremely rapid impacts—of those short electric wave-lengths we call Hertzian, and which carry the wireless messages. I must assume also that they are familiar with the elementary fact of physics that the vibrations of light and sound are interchangeable. The hearing-talking globes utilize both these principles, and with consummate simplicity. The light with which they shone was produced by an atomic "motor" within their base, similar to that which activated the merely illuminating globes. The composition of the phonic spheres gave their surfaces an acute sensitivity and resonance. In conjunction with its energizing power, the metal set up what is called a "field of force," which linked it with every particle of its kind no matter how distant. When vibrations of speech impinged upon the resonant surface its rhythmic light-vibrations were broken, just as a telephone transmitter breaks an electric current. Simultaneously these light-vibrations were changed into sound—on the surfaces of all spheres tuned to that particular instrument. The "crawling" colors which showed themselves at these times were literally the voice of the speaker in its spectrum equivalent. While usually the sounds produced required considerable familiarity with the apparatus to be understood quickly, they could, on occasion, be made startlingly loud and clear—as I was soon to realize.—W. T. G.

than they spoke of the Shining One?* The green dwarf knelt, took from his girdle-pouch a silk-wrapped something, unwound it—and, still kneeling, drew out a slender poniard of gleaming white metal, hilted with the blue, scintillating stones; stretching out a long arm he thrust it into O'Keefe's girdle; then gave him again the rare salute. Before he could rise the tripod globe chimed; swam with its film of racing colors; whispered. The dwarf listened.

"I hear!" he said. Its humming stopped, the crawling colors stilled. "You know the way." He turned to O'Keefe and to me. He followed us to the head of the pathway.

"Now," he said grimly, "let the Silent Ones show their power—if they still have it!"

And with this strange benediction perplexing me, we passed on.

"For God's sake, Larry," I urged as we approached the house of the priestess, "you'll be careful!"

He nodded—but I saw with a little deadly pang of apprehension in my heart a puzzled, lurking doubt within his eyes.

There were many guards about the place—far more than I had ever seen before. They stood at attention along the bowered path, and just before we reached the portal of the palace, a dozen of them, manifestly awaiting us, stepped forward, saluted, then formed on each side of us a guard of honor.

As we ascended the serpent steps Von Hetzdorp suddenly appeared. The blue robes were gone; he was clothed in gay green tunic and leg-swathings — and odd enough he looked in them, with his owl-rimmed spectacles and his pointed Teutonic beard. He gave a signal to our guards—and I wondered what influence the German had attained, for promptly, without question, they drew aside. At me he smiled amiably.

"It is goot to see you again, Dr. Goodwin," he said. "No doubt you have been observing much. You and I will have much to say to each other—yes?"

Friendly as were the words, in them was something furtively menacing.

"Have you found your friends yet?" he went on—and now I sensed something more deeply sinister in him. "No! It is too bad! Well, don't give up hope. I have an idea Olaf will find his wife before you find Professor Throckmartin, *Ja!*" His lips curled in a vulpine grin—what was the man hinting, what was he driving at? He turned to O'Keefe.

"Lieutenant, I would like to speak to you—alone!"

"I've no secrets from Goodwin," answered O'Keefe.

"So?" queried Von Hetzdorp suavely. He bent, whispered to Larry.

The Irishman started, eyed him with a certain shocked incredulity, then turned to me.

"Just a minute, Doc!" he said, and I caught the suspicion of a wink. They drew aside, out of ear-shot. The German talked rapidly. Larry was all attention. Von Hetzdorp's earnestness became intense; O'Keefe interrupted—appeared to question. Von Hetzdorp glanced at me and as his gaze shifted from O'Keefe, I saw a hot flame of rage and horror blaze up in the latter's eyes. At last O'Keefe appeared to consider gravely: nodded as though he had

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* I have no space here even to outline the eschatology of this people, nor to catalogue their pantheon. Siya and Siyana typified worldly love. Their ritual was, however, singularly free from those degrading elements usually found in love-cults. Their youthful priests and priestesses were selected from the most beautiful children of the ruling class, and at the age of nineteen the girls, and at the age of twenty-one the youths were automatically released from their service, taking, if they desired, mates. Priests and priestesses of all cults dwelt in the immense seven-terraced structure, of which the jet amphitheater was the water side. The symbol, icon, representation, of Siya and Siyana—the globe and the up-striving figures—typified earthly love, feet bound to earth, but eyes among the stars. Hell or heaven I never heard formulated, nor their equivalents; unless that existence in the Shining One's domain could serve for either. Over all this was Thanaroa, remote, unheeding, but still maker and ruler of all—an absentee First Cause personified! Thanaroa seemed to be the one article of belief in the creed of the soldiers—Rador, with his reverence for the Ancient Ones, was an exception. Whatever there was, indeed, of high, truly religious impulse among the Murians, this far, High God had. I found this exceedingly interesting, because it had long been my theory—to put the matter in the shape of a geometrical formula—that the real attractiveness of gods to man increases uniformly according to the square of their distance.—W. T. G.

arrived at some decision, and Von Hetzdorp, fairly beaming with delight and satisfaction, thrust his hand to him. And only I could have noticed Larry's shrinking, his microscopic hesitation before he took it, and his involuntary movement, as though to shake off something unclean, when the clasp had ended.

Von Hetzdorp, without another look at me, turned and went quickly within. The guards took their places, and we passed on to face whatever it was that fate held for us. I looked at Larry inquiringly.

"Don't ask a thing now, Doc!" he said tensely. "Wait till we get home. But we've got to get damned busy and quick—I'll tell you that now—"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TEMPTING OF LARRY.

WE paused before thick curtains, through which came the faint murmur of many voices. They parted; out came two—ushers, I suppose, they were—in cuirasses and kilts that reminded me somewhat of chain-mail—the first armor of any kind here that I had seen. They held open the folds, bowed, and as we entered fell in behind us.

The chamber, on whose threshold we stood, was far larger than either anteroom or hall of audience. Not less than three hundred feet long and half that in depth, from end to end of it ran two huge semicircular tables, paralleling each other, divided by a wide aisle, and heaped with flowers, with fruits, with viands unknown to me, and glittering with crystal flagons, beakers, goblets of as many hues as the blooms. And on the gay-cushioned couches that flanked the tables, lounging luxuriously, were scores of the fair-haired ruling class.

Their eyes were turned upon us, and there rose a little buzz of admiration, oddly mixed with a half-startled amaze, as their gaze fell upon O'Keefe in all his silvery magnificence. Everywhere the light-giving globes sent their roseate radiance.

The cuirassed dwarfs led us through the aisle. Within the arc of the inner half-circle was another glittering board, an oval. But of those seated there, facing us—I had eyes for only one—Yolara! She swayed up to greet O'Keefe—and she was like one of those white lily maids, whose beauty Hoang-Ku, the sage, says made the Gobi first a paradise, and whose lusts later the burned-out desert that it is. She held out hands to Larry, and on her face was passion—unashamed, unhiding.

She was Circe—but Circe conquered. Webs of filmiest white clung to the rose-leaf body—like rosy morning mists about a nymph of Diana. Twisted through the corn-silk hair a threaded circlet of pale sapphires shone; but they were pale beside Yolara's eyes. O'Keefe bent, kissed her hands, something more than mere admiration flaming from him. She saw—and, laughing, drew him down beside her.

It came to me that of all, only these two, Yolara and O'Keefe, were in white—and I wondered; then with a stiffening of nerves ceased to wonder as there entered—Lugur! He was all in scarlet, and as he strode forward the voices were still; a silence fell—a tense, strained silence.

His gaze turned upon Yolara, rested upon O'Keefe, and instantly his face grew—dreadful—there is no other word than that for it. Satan, losing heaven and finding an usurper on his throne in hell, could have held in his eyes no more of devilish malignity. It flashed through my mind, fancifully, that his face was like the pitch-black cloud hovering over a volcano's crater lit by the crimson flames below!

I had not noticed Von Hetzdorp, but now I saw him lean forward from the center of the table, near whose end I sat, touch Lugur, and whisper to him swiftly. With an appalling effort the red dwarf controlled himself; his rage slowly gave way to a sinister saturninity, coldly malefic as the rage had been hotly menacing. He saluted the priestess ironically, I thought; took his place at the further end of the oval. And now I noted that the figures between were the seven of that council of which the Shining One's priestess and Voice were the heads. The tension relaxed, but did not pass—as though a storm-cloud should turn away, but still lurk, threatening.

My gaze ran back. This end of the room was draped with the exquisitely colored, graceful curtains looped with gorgeous garlands. Between curtains and table, where sat Larry and the nine, a circular platform, perhaps ten yards in diameter, raised itself a few feet above the floor, its gleaming surface half-covered with the luminous petals, fragrant, delicate.

On each side, below it, were low carven stools. The curtains parted and softly entered girls bearing their flutes, their harps, the curiously emotion-exciting, octaved drums. They sank into their places. They touched their instruments; a faint, languorous measure throbbed through the rosy air.

The stage was set! What was to be the play?

Now about the tables passed other dusky-haired maids, fair bosoms bare, their scanty kirtles looped high, pouring out the wines for the feasters. And gradually into the voices of these crept the olden recklessness, the gaiety—but Lugur sat silent, brooding; his face like that of some fallen god; and I sensed behind the prisoning bars of his calm a monstrous striving of evil, struggling to be free.

My eyes sought O'Keefe. Whatever it had been that Von Hetzdorp had said, clearly it now filled his mind — even to the exclusion of the wondrous woman beside him. His eyes were stern, cold—and now and then, as he turned them toward the German, filled with a curious speculation. Yolara watched him, frowned, gave a low order to the Hebe behind her.

The girl disappeared, entered again with a ewer that seemed cut of amber. The priestess poured from it into Larry's glass a clear liquid that shook with tiny sparkles of light. She raised the glass to her lips, handed it to him. Half-smiling, half-abstractedly, he took it, touched his own lips where hers had kissed; drained it. A nod from Yolara and the maid refilled his goblet.

At once there was a swift transformation in the Irishman. His abstraction vanished; the watchfulness, the sternness fled; his eyes sparkled. He looked upon Yolara with seemingly a new vision; leaned caressingly toward her; whispered. Her blue eyes flashed triumphantly; her chiming laughter rang. She raised her own glass—but within it was *not* that clear drink that filled Larry's! And again he drained his own; and, lifting it, filled once more, caught the baleful eyes of Lugur, and raised the glass to him mockingly.

I watched him — anxiously; noted that Von Hetzdorp, too, was leaning forward apprehensively. Yolara swayed close—alluring, tempting. And wildly, ever more wildly, gay grew Larry. Whatever that drink, I thought, cold fear gathering at my heart, it was too potent for him. And this Circe—again the thought came to me why was this Circe, whom I had thought tamed, leading him into—drunkenness! And where was that strength of the O'Keefe upon which I had so leaned?

He arose, face all reckless gaiety, rollicking deviltry.

"A toast!" he cried in English, "to the Shining One—and may the hell where it belongs soon claim it!"

He had used their own word for their god—all else had been in his own tongue, and so, fortunately, they did not understand. But the intent of the contempt in his action they did recognize—and a dead, a fearful silence fell upon them all. Lugur's eyes blazed, little sparks of crimson in their green. Yolara reached up, caught at O'Keefe. He seized the soft hand; caressed it; his gaze grew far away, somber.

"The Shining One." He spoke low, as though to himself. "An' now again I see the faces of those who dance with it. It is the Fires of Mora—come, God alone knows how—from Erin—to this place. The Fires of Mora!" He contemplated the hushed folk before him; and then from his lips came that weirdest, most haunting of the lyric legends of Erin—the Curse of Mora:

"The fretted fires of Mora blew o'er him in the night;
He thrills no more to loving, nor weeps for past delight.
For when those flames have bitten, both grief and joy take flight—
For when those flames have bitten, both joy and grief take flight!"

Again Yolara tried to draw him down

beside her; and once more he gripped her hand. His eyes grew fixed—he crooned:

"And through the sleeping silence his feet must track the tune,
When the world is barred and speckled with silver of the moon—
When the world is barred and speckled with silver of the moon."

He stood, swaying, for a moment, and then, laughing, let the priestess have her way; drained again the glass.

And now my heart was cold, indeed—for what hope was there left—with Larry mad, wild drunk!

The silence was unbroken — elf women and dwarfs glancing furtively at each other. But now Yolara arose, face set, eyes flashing gray.

"Hear you, the council, and you, Lugur—and all who are here!" she cried. "Now I, the priestess of the Shining One, take, as is my right, my mate. And this is he!" She pointed down upon Larry. He glanced up at her roguishly.

"Can't quite make out what you say, Yolara," he muttered thickly. "But say anything—you like—I love your voice!" He laughed, glanced at Lugur, now upon his feet, forced calmness gone, volcano-seething. "Don't be such a skeleton at the feast, old dear!" cried O'Keefe. "Everybody's merry and bright here—sure—everybody's merry and bright!"

I turned sick with dread. Yolara's hand stole softly upon the Irishman's curls caressingly. He drew it down; kissed it.

"You know the law, Yolara." Lugur's voice was flat, deadly. "You may not mate with other than your own kind. And this man is a stranger—a barbarian—food for the Shining One!" Literally, he spat the phrase.

"No, not of our kind—Lugur—higher!" Yolara answered serenely. "Lo, higher even than the Ancient Ones—a son of Siya and of Siyana!"

"A lie!" roared the red dwarf. "A lie!"

"The Shining One revealed it to me!" said Yolara sweetly. "And if ye believe not, Lugur—go ask of the Shining One if it be not truth!"

There was bitter, nameless menace in those last words—and whatever their hidden message to Lugur, it was potent. He stood, choking, face hell-shadowed — Von Hetzdorp leaned out again, whispered. The red dwarf bowed, now wholly ironically; resumed his place and his silence. And again I wondered, icy-hearted, what was the power the German had so to sway Lugur—what was it that he had said to O'Keefe?—and what plots and counter-plots were hatching in that unscrupulous brain?

"What says the council?" Yolara demanded, turning to them.

Only for a moment they consulted among themselves. Then the woman, whose face was a ravaged shrine of beauty, spoke.

"The will of the priestess is the will of the council!" she answered.

Defiance died from Yolara's face; she looked down at Larry tenderly. He sat swaying, crooning. She clapped her hands, and one of the cuirassed dwarfs strode to her.

"Bid the priests come," she commanded, then turned to the silent room. "By the rites of Siya and Siyana, Yolara takes their son for her mate," she said; and again her hand stole down possessingly, serpent soft, to the drunken head of the O'Keefe.

The curtains parted widely. Through them filed, two by two, twelve hooded figures clad in flowing robes of the green one sees in forest vistas of opening buds of dawning spring. Of each pair one bore clasped to breast, a globe of that milky crystal I had seen in the sapphire shrine-room; the other a harp, small, shaped somewhat like the ancient clarsach of the Druids.

Two by two they stepped upon the raised platform, placed gently upon it each their globe; and two by two crouched behind them. They formed now a star of six points about the petaled dais, and, simultaneously, they drew from their faces the covering cowls.

I half-rose from my feet — youth and maidens these of the fair-haired; all young; and youths and maids more beautiful than any of those I had yet seen—for upon their faces was little of that disturbing mockery to which I have been forced so often, because of the deep impression it made upon

me, to refer. The ashen-gold of the maiden priestesses' hair was wound about their brows in shining coronals. The pale locks of the youths were clustered within circlets of translucent, glimmering gems like moonstones. And then, crystal globe alternately before and harp alternately held by youth and maid, they began to sing.

What was that song, I do not know—nor ever shall. Archaic, ancient beyond thought, it seemed—not with the ancientness of things that for uncounted ages have been but wind-driven dust. Rather was it the ancientness of the golden youth of the world, love lilts of earth younglings, with light of new-born suns drenching them, chorals of young stars mating in space; murmurings of April gods and goddesses. A languor stole through me. The rosy lights upon the tripods began to die away, and as they faded the milky globes gleamed forth brighter, ever brighter. Yolara rose, stretched a hand to Larry, led him through the sextuple groups, and stood face to face with him in the center of their circle.

The rose-light died; all that immense chamber was black, save for the circle of the glowing spheres. Within this their milky radiance grew brighter — brighter. The song whispered away. A throbbing arpeggio dripped from the harps, and as the notes pulsed out, up from the globes, as though striving to follow, pulsed with them tips of moon-fire cones, such as I had seen before Yolara's altar. Weirdly, caressingly, compellingly the harp notes throbbed in repeated, re-repeated theme, holding within itself the same archaic golden quality I had noted in the singing. And over the moon flame pinnacles rose higher!

Yolara lifted her arms; within her hands were clasped O'Keefe's. She raised them above their two heads and slowly, slowly drew him with her into a circling, graceful, step, tendrilings, delicate as the slow spiralings of twilight mist upon some still stream.

As they swayed the rippling arpeggios grew louder, and suddenly the slender pinnacles of moon fire bent, dipped, flowed to the floor, crept in a shining ring around those two—and began to rise, a gleaming, glimmering, enchanted barrier—rising, ever rising—hiding them!

With one swift movement Yolara unbound her circlet of pale sapphires, shook loose the waves of her silken hair. It fell, a rippling, wondrous cascade, veiling both her and O'Keefe to their girdles—and now the shining coils of moon fire had crept to their knees—was circling higher—higher.

And ever despair grew deeper in my soul!

What was that! I started to my feet, and all around me in the blackness I heard startled motion. From without came a blaring of trumpets, the sound of running men, loud murmurings. The tumult drew closer. I heard cries of "Lakla! Lakla!" Now it was at the very threshold and within it, oddly, as though—punctuating—the clamor, a deep-toned, almost abyssmal, booming sound — thunderously bass and reverberant.

Abruptly the harpings ceased; the moon fires shuddered, fell, and began to sweep back into the crystal globes; Yolara's swaying form grew rigid, every atom of it seeming to be listening with intensity so great that it was itself like clamor. She threw aside the veiling cloud of hair, and in the gleam of the last retreating spirals I saw her face glare out like some old Greek mask of tragedy.

The sweet lips that, even at their sweetest could never lose their delicate cruelty, had no sweetness now. They were drawn into a square — inhuman as that of the Medusa; in her eyes were the fires of the pit, and her hair seemed to writhe like the serpent locks of that Gorgon, whose mouth she had borrowed; all her beauty was transformed into a nameless thing—hideous, inhuman, blasting! If this was the true soul of Yolara springing to her face, then, I thought, God help us in very deed!

I wrested my gaze away to O'Keefe. All drunkenness gone, himself again, he was staring down at that hellish sight, and in his eyes were loathing and horror unutterable. So they stood—and the light fled.

Only for a moment did the darkness hold. With lightning swiftness the blackness that was the chamber's other wall vanished. Through a portal, open between gray screens, the silver sparkling light poured.

And through the portal marched, two by two, incredible, nightmare figures — frog men, giants, taller by nearly a yard than even tall O'Keefe! Their enormous saucer eyes were irised by wide bands of green-flecked red, in which the phosphorescence flickered like cold flames. Their long muzzles, lips half-open in monstrous grin, held rows of glistening, slender, lancet sharp fangs. Over the glaring eyes arose a horny helmet, a carapace of black and orange scales, studded with foot-long lance-headed horns.

They lined themselves like soldiers on each side of the wide table aisle, and now I could see that this horny armor covered shoulders and backs, ran across the chest in a knobbed cuirass, and at wrists and heels jutted out into curved, murderous spurs. The webbed hands and feet ended in yellow, spade-shaped claws. A short kilt of the same pale amber stones that I had seen upon the apparition of the Moon Pool Chamber's wall hung about their swollen middles.

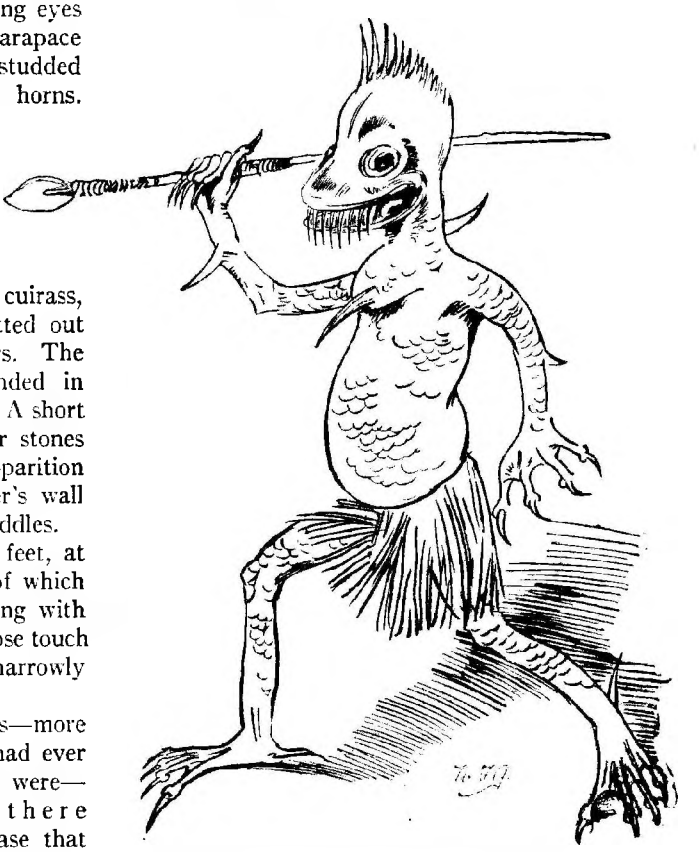
They carried spears, ten feet, at least, in length, the heads of which were pointed cones, glistening with that same covering, from whose touch of swift decay I had so narrowly saved Rador.

They were grotesque, yes—more grotesque than anything I had ever seen or dreamed, and they were—terrible! Half-hysterically t h e r e came into my mind a phrase that O'Keefe himself might have used: "What a sight for Larry to open his eyes upon on the morning after!"

In all the chamber there was now no sound. Yolara's hellish face had changed no whit; nor had O'Keefe's eyes left it.

And then, quietly, through the ranks of the frog men came—a girl! Behind her, enormous pouch at his throat swelling in and out menacingly, in one paw a treelike, spike-studded mace, a frog-man, huger than any of the others, guarding. But of him I caught but a fleeting, involuntary impression—all my gaze was for the girl.

For it was she who had pointed out to us the way from the peril of the Dweller's lair on Nan-Tauach. And as I gazed at her, I marveled that ever could I have thought the priestess more beautiful. Turning, I saw Larry's own gaze leave Yolara for her; saw him stiffen, and to his eyes



A ROUGH SKETCH OF A WARRIOR OF THE AKKA, BY DR. GOODWIN. NOTE THE REMARKABLY DEVELOPED FOREHEAD AND THE CURIOUS PROTECTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF SCALES AND SPIKES.

rush joy incredible and an utter abasement of shame.

And from all about came murmurs—edged with anger, half-incredulous, tinged with fear:

"Lakla!"

"Lakla!"

"The handmaiden to the Silent Ones!"

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

The Shadow

by

John D. Swain

A DESIRE for some of Mme. Poiron's incomparable *côtelettes au vin blanc* drew me to her little restaurant on the Boul' Mich., and there I encountered my friend Lapierre, of the Paris police. He had finished lunching, and, *café gloria* at his right hand, a thin black cigar between his lips, was reading a paper novel propped against the sugar bowl.

He insisted that I share his table, and offered to scribble a line on a bit of paper, and bet me a louis that I would order what he had written.

"Just to prove that I possess psychic powers," he teased.

I refused smilingly. "You know very well that only two things bring me to Mme. Poiron's," said I—"her *côtelettes* and the chance of meeting you."

"In that order?"

"Certainly—for I am sure of the former—while you are an uncertain quantity. A *côtelette* in the mouth is worth—"

"Granted," he interrupted, and, Alfred approaching, I gave my order and waited for Lapierre to explain his latest case—which, by the by, he rarely did.

"I am reading a detective story by one of your clever American writers," he remarked, laying aside the paper book. "They take my mind off my profession, they are so improbable."

"You don't care for the sleuth in fiction, then?"

"On the contrary, he gives me great pleasure," said Lapierre. "He could be sure of a salaried position in the *service de la sûreté* at any time. The trouble with him is, he doesn't exist. He is invariably superman—a prodigy of genius such as may appear once or twice in a generation, but never in my profession. There we are simple, hard-working specialists, ungifted by God with the miraculous prescience of our friends of the *contes et nouvelles*."

"Oh, come!" I expostulated, largely to draw him out. "You are too modest."

Lapierre smiled and took a swallow of his black coffee.

"You have heard, *mon ami*, that twice I have had my pockets picked?"

I nodded.

"And they will doubtless be rifled again. I am called absentminded. It really isn't quite that—it is rather a matter of concentration. I am like a horse in that I can think of only one thing at a time. Tickle his ear, and he can usually be started along—because as soon as he thinks about the tickling he forgets to balk. Now, if I were engaged in a game of chess, I dare say one might remove every rag of clothes from me, and leave me sitting before my scandalized opponent as bare as the day I was born. But were I to make a wrong move on the board it would not be from absentmindedness. I have the faculty of pigeonholing all facts not needed at the time. It is

really a species of mental orderliness. I can never bear to have my desk cluttered up with old papers and matter irrelevant to the subject at hand. So with my brain."

"What do you consider the necessary equipment of a great detective?" I asked.

"Knowledge of human nature, of course, as in every profession or business, and tireless perseverance."

"Well," said I, "that kills about two-thirds of the story sleuths."

"*Mais certainement*," shrugged Lapierre. "Readers want action, crises, thrills, a brilliant climax. A large part of detective work consists of shadowing—the most tedious, monotonous task under the sun. You hear of a dramatic arrest; but you know little or nothing of the weeks and months of unremitting toil by the shadow, who must not relax his vigilance for a moment. It is like a terrier at a rat-hole; if he dozes for a second, and M. Rat slips out, his hours of patient watching are all in vain."

Now I knew that Lapierre enjoyed a unique position in the *service de la sûreté*. He was responsible solely to the prefect, and was spared all the red tape, the reporting and dry detail of police routine. The prefect knew at all times where to find him, but there were weeks on end when he was free to go and come as he pleased, providing he did not wander too far from Paris. So it was that we spent many happy days together, fishing, attending the races at Neuilly or Anteuil, prowling about old Paris, at the theater, or chatting in some café. Then, suddenly, Lapierre would disappear, and it was only now and then that I could learn what he had been about, tantalized, as I was, by the meager facts he let drop when in the right mood.

"Take my own work," he remarked, as if answering my thoughts. "When I am called into a case, it is rarely to discover a criminal; it is to convict him. Our specialists have already done their efficient work—work that I could do no more than could you. The expert on blood-stains, on wheel tracks, and foot and finger-prints, the men who specialize on burglar's tools, or ledgers, or wounds, or weapons, or any of the physical evidences of crime, have all made their investigations, and the suspect is named. In but a very small percentage of cases are the police ignorant of the identity of the criminal."

"Yet quite an alarming number escape punishment," I objected.

"True; it is often impossible to convict. Figure it for yourself, *mon ami:* a prisoner is brought to trial. Quite possibly every one in court save the jury is aware of his guilt. The police, the prosecutor, the judge, the prisoner's counsel—yet, unless the jury can be convinced beyond a reasonable doubt, the man goes free. Assume that the jury is incorruptible and fairly intelligent. Even so, the evidence may be so technical that it is exceedingly difficult to make it comprehensible to the ordinary mind.

"So it is that I am sometimes called in to fix the crime upon the man whom the police have designated. I assume that they have done their part competently; I *must* so assume. They, on their part, having exercised their special talents, assume that I will do 'my bit' and complete their case. In most instances, however, they secure evidence so strong that I am not needed."

Alfred brought my order at this point.

"And usually you try for a confession?" I asked between mouthfuls, thinking of "The Case of Raoul Desharnais" (see ALL-STORY WEEKLY, December 1, 1917), in which Lapierre had scored notably.

"It is my preference," he admitted. "It is conclusive; it leaves no loose ends or unexplained circumstances — it saves an expensive trial."

"And you told me that most confessions were inspired by fear," I commented.

"*All* confessions," corrected Lapierre. "Fear of *something*. Not necessarily terror, you understand. I could tell you of one made in cold blood by a man whom we could never otherwise have convicted—and who knew it."

I shook my head incredulously—partly because my mouth was full of *côtelette*, and partly because nothing is so likely to draw from Lapierre one of his stories. He often refuses to answer a question, but seldom a shrug or a dissenting gesture.

It was so in this case, and when my own coffee had been fetched and the table cleared, Lapierre, with his half-closed eyes

fixed dreamily upon the blue incense of his cigar, told me the story of Henri Larocque.

Some years ago financial circles in Paris were profoundly shocked by the news that some five hundred thousand francs had been stolen from the Banc d'Afrique. The sum in itself was too small to affect in the slightest degree the credit of this rich and conservative institution, but the fact that half a million in gold and paper money could be abstracted from a bank, regarded as impregnable as the Treasury itself, was disturbing.

Every prospective employee had passed a most rigid examination, and, if hired, was subjected to careful espionage as to his manner of life. No greater care was exercised in any of the government departments, where prudence and integrity are as carefully considered as ability.

The police investigation revealed the fact that any one of three men might have committed the theft. Having narrowed the possible suspects to this group, all of whom promptly resigned, pending the inquiry, a rigid interrogation of each was undertaken with the thoroughness for which the *service de la sûreté* is famous.

One of the three was a son of the First Vice-President of the Banc d'Afrique, himself the heir to a large fortune, and betrothed to the eldest daughter of the president, with a large dot. He was a quiet, studious fellow, known to live well within his salary, and not to have involved his future inheritance, upon which he could, at any time, have borrowed extensively.

Another of the suspects had no means beyond his salary, but had lived so prudently that he had saved several thousand francs which he had on deposit in the Banc d'Afrique. Nothing tending to show that he had lived in an extravagant or dissipated manner could be unearthed by the police agents, who retraced his daily (and nightly) routine for months prior to the robbery. He had no living relatives, and, unable to secure a new position, departed for Algiers and enlisted in the Foreign Legion.

The third man was Henri Larocque.

Upon a certain day Lapierre was called to the prefecture, and informed that he was expected to secure evidence against Larocque, for which purpose he was given *carte blanche* in time, method, and expense. Lapierre knew nothing of the robbery save what he had read in the journals, was not informed as to the methods by which the police had come to the conclusion that Larocque was the guilty man, and had never seen the latter. In all, he was closeted with the prefect for less than five minutes. In accordance with his system, he accepted the police statement implicitly, and went to work at once.

Larocque was a man of thirty-four, a stalwart, good-looking chap, of considerable intelligence, rather easy living. He spent a good deal of money, but was by no means a spendthrift.

His life was not conspicuous for any narrow asceticism, yet it was sufficiently circumspect to have satisfied his employers. He was married, without children, to a pretty but colorless girl, the daughter of a petty tradesman in his native town. Rumor credited (or debited) him with having rather outgrown an alliance formed before he had enlarged his *bourgeois* horizon in Paris, and it was known that they were not happy together; but as both were Catholic, and as, furthermore, it is difficult under French laws for a wife to secure a divorce for marital infidelity, they had not separated. However, she spent most of her time with her parents, and Larocque bore these separations with the utmost fortitude.

They maintained no establishment in Paris, taking rooms in a quiet hotel when she was in town, while he occupied a little suite, when alone, with a man servant, to look after him. He had apparently taken no steps toward securing employment since resigning from the Banc d'Afrique, but as he had been employed there for many years at a good salary, and was known to have made several good investments, there was nothing suspicious in his present manner of life.

At nine o'clock on a certain morning as Larocque, clad in dressing gown, was idling over his *café au lait* and the morning journals, his servant placed on the table a card engraved with the name of M. Arnault Lapierre, with *service de la sûreté* in fine lettering beneath. Larocque glanced at it

with no change of expression, and bade Gaspard show the visitor up.

Larocque did not rise as he entered a moment later, but bowed courteously and bade him seat himself, at the same time offering to pour him a cup of coffee, and tendering his cigarette-box, which Lapierre smilingly refused.

"To what am I indebted—" inquired Larocque, gently stirring a fresh lump of sugar into his cup.

"*Monsieur* will, I trust, pardon so early a call," began Lapierre, whose sleepy eyes and gentle voice conveyed a curious impression of amiable indifference. "I wished to make sure of finding him at home, and I am aware that early forenoon is, perhaps, the only time one may be sure of meeting an agreeable young gentleman of leisure in his own ménage. I come, as you have doubtless guessed, in connection with your case."

"My case?" repeated Larocque, with a slight lift of his eyebrows.

"The Banc d'Afrique affair, in connection with which *monsieur* tendered his resignation," explained Lapierre.

"True," nodded Larocque, after finishing the last swallow of coffee and pushing aside his cup. "I resigned, pending the discovery of the guilty party, which I understand the police are at work upon, and after which I shall resume my place at the bank. The idea was wholly mine."

"Quite so," agreed Lapierre—"so that an early disposal of the case will gratify *monsieur* as well as the Banc d'Afrique and the police. I have had the honor to be assigned to obtain from you the final statement necessary to complete our case, which is at present at an *impasse*."

"The police, then, have failed?" Larocque inquired politely.

"Not at all, M. Larocque; they have merely finished their part of the investigation, and now I am detailed to secure from you the confession which will supplement and complete the task of the prefecture."

Henri Larocque lighted a cigarette, and slowly inhaled it, eying Lapierre thoughtfully meanwhile.

"You speak very glibly of my 'confession,' M. Lapierre," he said at length. "As a matter of fact, you have not a particle of evidence against me."

"That is why your confession is desired," explained Lapierre. "You see, *monsieur*, the *dossier* of the case is now at the prefecture, complete up to this point. We know that one of three men committed the Banc d'Afrique robbery. Two of them have been eliminated. There remains yourself. Thus your confession, attached to this *dossier*, renders it a finished document, and ends our labors."

"On what grounds have these other two been eliminated — and the crime fastened upon me?"

"I have no more idea than you have," Lapierre frankly admitted. "This part of the investigation was in charge of others. I have only just been called in."

Incredulity overspread Larocque's rather indolent features.

"You mean to tell me, *monsieur*, that you have called to secure a confession from me this morning?" he asked.

Lapierre shrugged.

"This morning, or later; entirely at your own convenience, of course."

"And you actually think I will confess?"

For the first time Lapierre looked surprised.

"Think it?" he said; "why, certainly! Otherwise I should not have come."

He drew forth a gun-metal case, selected a thin black cigar, and lighted it after asking permission.

"And *why* should I do such an astounding thing, even if I were guilty, which I am not? How do you propose to secure this confession?"

"I haven't the least idea in the world," confessed Lapierre. "I haven't the happiness to know *monsieur* as yet. I must familiarize myself with his temperament. My visit was undertaken to inform him that it is to be my agreeable task to be thrown much in his society from now on, in order that I may learn how best to secure this confession."

"You mean that I am to be *shadowed?* Then I should have expected *monsieur* to don green whiskers and horn-spectacles, or whatever it is shadows disguise themselves in, rather than to call upon me openly."

Lapierre frowned slightly.

"Such methods would be an insult to *monsieur's* intelligence," he said. "Besides, I am the frankest of mortals, and always prefer to avoid all misunderstanding. It seemed better by far to state the case openly. One does not like to feel that he has been surreptitiously spied upon."

Larocque studied the dreamy eyes of his visitor for some time. Finally he asked: "And how long is this state of affairs to endure?"

"Why—until *monsieur* finds it agreeable to confess!"

"Yes—but granted I do not?"

"Why, then, it will endure like the state of matrimony, 'Until death do us part!'"

"You mean that you will favor me with your company until I confess—or one of us dies?"

"Undoubtedly. I even venture to hope that we may discover some tastes in common; above all things, that you may not find me a bore. You see, M. Larocque, the prefect has filed away the *dossier*, pending the confession needed to make it a complete document. To all intent, he has forgotten it. The case rests now in my hands; I may be said to have a perpetual commission. The prefect may die, or resign; another, or others, may fill his chair. The Banc d'Afrique itself may wind up its affairs, or all of its officers and stockholders may die; *monsieur's dossier* meanwhile sleeps in its pigeonhole, awaiting the confession."

"Meanwhile M. Arnault Lapierre has easy employment for life!"

"Let us say, rather, an *agreeable* employment," amended Lapierre, rising to take his departure, "spent largely in M. Larocque's society, it could not be otherwise."

He bowed himself out, having accomplished the first step, by forcing Larocque, as he believed, to meditate a great deal upon what he had said, without the relief of being able to discuss it with others.

In this belief Lapierre was entirely correct. Henri Larocque had been questioned by police agents, and had reason to believe that his rooms had been entered, his private papers, and even his mail, tampered with. It was his belief that he was safe, that no evidence which did not equally implicate two other men, both innocent, existed against him.

The visit from Lapierre puzzled him. It did not in the least alarm him—if anything, he had been slightly amused. Yet he found his mind constantly recurring to it, and with less and less satisfaction. The fact that he could imagine no circumstance which could give Lapierre a clue, a lever to use against him, was singularly uncomforting.

There is a type of mind which wears itself out in vain conjecture unless able to form some sort of plausible conclusion. Could he have found one he would have been satisfied, and dismissed it from his thoughts. Why had Lapierre seemed so cheerfully confident that he would confess? Was it merely a professional pose on his part? Why had he called and discussed the matter so frankly, almost impersonally?

He took early opportunity to learn what he could about him. It was not much, but it was disturbing. Every one he asked knew vaguely of Lapierre as a saver of desperate cases. He listened to many stories, sometimes to variations of the same story in which he figured as hero; he learned that he had the reputation of never falling down on a case he undertook. But it was evident to him that no one knew very much about the man or his methods. His reputation seemed to be based on universal hearsay. That the prefect had placed the affair in his hands was evidence enough that he was a thoroughly competent operator. He knew that much, and that the *service de la sûreté* can be very patient.

There began a singular game of shadowing, in which the quarry knew perfectly well who his shadow was, and indeed usually bowed to him, and occasionally spoke with him. Rarely, as a relief from his introspection, he deliberately sought his society. Once or twice they played dominos for a stake of a few francs on a rainy afternoon in some café. Once they occupied adjoining seats at the Jockey Club, and won a bet on the same horse, afterward sharing a bottle of wine together, in mild celebration, at the club buffet.

But Lapierre was always considerate. He never seemed to see Larocque unless the latter bowed or spoke. He did not force himself upon him, as he might have done—for the French law gives its agents wide latitude in criminal investigation. It does not, as does our common law, presume a man innocent until proved guilty; it by no means admits that his house, his flat, or his room is his castle, and has no scruples in entering them and ransacking their contents.

Yet Larocque was certain this had not been attempted since Lapierre took over his case. He laid little stratagems in order to find out: silken threads, sealing-wax, a seemingly casual but really complex arrangement of bric-à-brac, desk contents and trunks. Nothing was ever disturbed, save by his man servant, in the routine of his duties.

On the other hand, the constant surveillance was by no means agreeable, and became less so week by week. Never to enter a restaurant without seeing Lapierre unobtrusively seat himself near by, usually behind him, where he could feel his eyes boring into the base of his brain, although Lapierre was probably scanning the menu, or prying a succulent *escargot* from its shell. To know that he was always in an adjacent stall when he went to the opera or theater. To find him on the platform when he alighted at some little seaside town for a brief vacation, and to see him idly smoking one of his thin black cigars when he entered his house at night, whatever the hour, it all got on his nerves.

Furthermore, it affected others. It was impossible that this sort of thing could go on indefinitely without rousing comment. Waiters at the establishments he patronized knew that he was being followed. The *concierge* knew it. Worst of all, the gay companions of his nocturnal ramblings learned of it—and men and women began to decline his invitations with polite regrets. No devotee of pleasure, however harmless, likes to have as a member of his crew a man under vigilant espionage. And practically every one knew *why* Larocque was being shadowed. One by one they dropped away. He was constantly forced to recruit new pals to close up the ranks. His soul was embittered against Lapierre.

"What would you do if I were to emigrate?" Larocque asked him one day.

"Why, I should go, too. But this would be rather a pity—for I should be obliged to exercise more vigilance, and notify the local police of the circumstances, since I alone could not watch you in a foreign country."

"You couldn't have me extradited!" challenged Larocque.

"I could when I have your signed confession," answered Lapierre tranquilly.

As a matter of fact, he did try to shake Lapierre once. He decided to go to Naples, as an experiment. By an ingeniously intricate route, embracing trolleys, trains, a hired motor-car, and even more or less pedestrianism, he at length reached Marseilles without once having seen his nemesis. But, on the very day his boat was to sail, as he dined at an obscure restaurant, a man, reading at a table near by, laid down his newspaper—and it was Lapierre. The two rode back to Paris on the same train.

In truth, Lapierre did not really shadow Larocque at all. There were many hours on end when he knew little of what Larocque was doing, and cared less. It was only the *appearance* of shadowing he sought to convey; and he so managed it as to seem to be tirelessly vigilant, whereas, having shown himself at his victim's hotel, or train, or cabaret, and been recognized, he usually took himself off and dismissed him from his mind. The actual "tailing" was done by men whom Larocque did not suspect at all, one of whom was constantly in touch with him, and who traced him to Marseilles, telegraphing his arrival to Lapierre. Prior to the arrival of the *petit bleu*, he had no idea where he was. The shadows reported direct to the prefecture. Lapierre cared nothing for their records.

Accepting the fact of Larocque's guilt without question, he patiently sought for the weak spot in his armor. One by one he made note of his mental and moral characteristics. It was soon evident to him that he was not sufficiently intimate with any woman to make it worth while to cultivate that field.

Like a prosperous bumble-bee, Larocque buzzed amiably from flower to flower in the garden of love, sipped honey and winged away into the sunshine. Nor had he any close male friend. He had unquestionably acted alone in the affair of the Banc d'Afrique, and there was no probability of his incriminating himself in any way by writing. The money he took could not be identified, and he had skilfully split it up and *cached* it in investments where it could not be traced.

More and more one trait of Larocque's appeared and reappeared: a violent temper, concealed usually under an outward veneer of *bon camaraderie*. Lapierre learned that he had frequently changed servants, and through them he verified his observations. It was rare for a valet to stay more than a few months with him. He learned, also, of bitter domestic quarrels, in which Larocque's amiable wife was generally absolved of blame. How, then, could he utilize this temper? Blind rage is a weakness; but was it thinkable that Larocque should make a confession while in a rage? Why should he?

Larocque, meanwhile, thought, and even dreamed, along similar lines. How did Lapierre expect to wheedle or extort a confession from him? Better than the detective, he knew how closely his secret was locked in his own breast. Sometimes, he knew, men under the influence of alcohol bared their life-histories; did Lapierre hope for that in his case? Never in his life had he been more than agreeably exhilarated by champagne. Spirits he did not touch at all. It occurred to him that it would be a simple matter for Lapierre to drug him. Was there some deliriant which set a man's tongue foolishly wagging? For some days, in the Bibliothèque Nationale, he studied the matter. Also, he interrogated an acquaintance who was somewhat of a chemist. No such drug was known.

It chanced that a singular adventure gave him a welcome reprieve about this time. He had seated himself at Lapierre's table before a boulevard café, and the latter suggested a visit to a certain apache resort.

"The police tolerate the place," he explained, "because it is frequented by criminals with whom they are enabled to keep in touch. There are plenty there who would stick a knife into a police agent with a pleasure as keen as their blades; but a certain armed truce exists, a sort of gentlemen's agreement. We never take a man into custody in that café, although we may do so directly he crosses the threshold. They, on their part, would not dream of assaulting us there. The Vieux Rat is a sort of unholy sanctuary. If you would like to come, I can assure you that there is no more danger than there would be in the Madeleine itself."

So they had visited the Vieux Rat, and Larocque had been interested in its unsavory clientele. Perfect courtesy prevailed; with Parisian suavity the apelike *patron* and his degenerate guests greeted Lapierre, witty badinage, in an *argot* Larocque but imperfectly understood, passed back and forth. They had a glass of wine with the *patron*, and he smoked one of Lapierre's thin black cigars, and his pretense of liking it could not have been better done in a club.

It was a dark, foggy night as they threaded their way homeward, with the street lamps glowing like night-lights in a sick chamber. Suddenly, as they came under the pallid rays of one at a corner, a man darted out from the bisecting alley with a revolver, which he instantly aimed at Lapierre and fired. Larocque had a glimpse of a sinister, white face slashed by a red scar. Lapierre drew his own gun with amazing swiftness, and fired once; his assailant fired a second time as Lapierre's weapon clattered to the pavement. The unknown man darted like a spider back into the dark alley from which he had issued, and the detective sagged heavily toward Larocque, who caught and supported him.

"He got me!" breathed Lapierre. "Hold me up a moment—the police—"

Two officers came up on the run; one of them gently eased Lapierre to the pavement, while the other, flash-light in hand, sped down the alley indicated by Larocque.

Before more than two or three loiterers had gathered, a taxi appeared, summoned by the officer's shrill whistle, and Lapierre was carefully lifted and placed within.

"*Monsieur* would better come, too," the

gendarme said. "This is a dangerous locality. We will set you down when we come to the boulevards."

Lapierre had whispered the name of his assailant, and then relapsed into silence. The officer bent over him as the taxicab raced toward the hospital.

"Is he fatally hurt, do you think?" asked Larocque.

"Impossible to say—there isn't much blood flowing; but he may be bleeding internally."

In a few moments they slowed down and Larocque jumped to the pavement. He found himself in front of a café, and, feeling a bit shaky, entered and called for a cordial. So suddenly had it all happened that until now he had not realized what Lapierre's death would mean to him. It would be a new lease of life—the removal of a terrible incubus. He was tempted to call up the hospital and make certain of Lapierre's condition; but prudence overruled. That night he dreamed pleasantly of acting as his pallbearer.

The next day he eagerly scanned the papers, but found no reference to the affair. Doubtless the police had hushed it up. He racked his memory to recall whether, among the evil faces at the Vieux Rat, he had seen that of the man who shot Lapierre. He was half-convinced that he had. Probably he was an apache, who had followed them from the cabaret to satisfy an ancient grudge.

Another day, and yet another, went by, and Larocque, freed from hateful espionage, filled his lungs like a diver coming up for air. If only he could be sure Lapierre was dead. He had said that the case was his; it would end only with a confession, or the death of one or the other of them. It seemed improbable that a successor would take up his work.

But on the fourth day he saw him, looking rather pale and ill, as he was finishing his *déjeuner à la fourchette*. The shock was infinitely greater than when the shooting took place. However, he shook hands with him, seated himself at his table, and inquired solicitously as to his condition.

"Sheer luck," smiled Lapierre. "The fellow beat me by a quarter of a second—I must have missed him clean; there were no drops of blood to track him by. The Quarter had swallowed him up. But I know him; 'Cocu,' an apache. We shall get him, unless he has already slipped across to Algiers to join the Foreign Legion."

He fumbled in his pocket, and laid upon the table his gunmetal cigar-case.

"Behold, *monsieur!* I am saved by my little vice."

He pointed to a ragged hole through the case.

"The bullet's force was broken; I merely suffered a splintered rib and the loss of a little blood. Much better than a punctured heart!"

Larocque could have stamped upon the case in fury, the while he assured Lapierre of his satisfaction at his escape.

Matters now went on as before. The shadow darkened Larocque's days once again, all the more somber after his brief respite.

One day he took a woman of his acquaintance to an oyster-house, where the little coppery bivalves are famed among epicures. Lapierre had followed him to the entrance, and then sauntered on, as he frequently did when his quarry was safely located. The two ate in a little close-curtained *cabinet particulier*, and Larocque, who was almost equally devoted to ladies and oysters, was enjoying himself thoroughly when a name softly spoken in the adjoining stall arrested his attention.

Two men were conversing in low tones there. He could catch but a phrase now and then, but the word "Cocu" occurred frequently. Larocque's companion rallied him on his distrait air, pouted, sulked, and went through her various paces to rouse him to his usual form. He did his best, but only succeeded in being civil; and when at length he placed her in a taxicab, he breathed what would have been, in a pious man, a prayer of thanks.

A careful survey failed to reveal Lapierre anywhere. He was the most obvious of shadows. Larocque went back to the *cabinet particulier* where he had overheard the two men, and knocked softly.

After a dead silence, a surly voice demanded: *"Qui frappe?"*

"Be good enough to open," said Larocque quietly. "It is important."

A scowling face appeared in the slit of the door.

"It is Cocu I would speak with," Larocque whispered, and slipped through the grudgingly opened door.

The second man in the little room wore spectacles, and his face was heavily bearded; but Larocque recognized the scar, and his eyes. It was the one who had shot Lapierre.

"May I speak with you alone, *monsieur?*" he asked; and at a sign from Cocu, his companion withdrew, muttering. Cocu never took his eyes from Larocque.

"Who are you who call me Cocu?"

"You are the man who shot Lapierre," said Larocque. "Wait!" he cried, as the other's hand crept stealthily toward his pocket. "I was with him that night. But I am no friend of his!"

"How do I know that?" growled Cocu.

"Do you recall the Banc d'Afrique affair?"

Cocu nodded.

"Well—Lapierre is shadowing me for that."

"Then your name is Larocque!"

For answer Larocque showed him one of his visiting-cards.

"Why haven't you made a good job of it, Cocu? Lapierre knows who shot him, and the police are looking for you. You might as well have your head cut off as be guillotined, as they say. You are disguised—but do you think the detectives will be fooled by a few whiskers? Even I knew you, and I never saw you but once."

"*Blague de cochon!*" hissed Cocu. "How can I risk it, with no money to make my way out of the country!"

"Listen, Cocu," whispered Larocque, leaning across the table, "it's worth money to me to have him out of the way. How much do you need?"

Cocu disclaimed mercenary motives; he would kill the *vermine malade* for pleasure; if Larocque would see him to Antwerp, it was all he would ask, or accept.

Larocque took a five-hundred franc note from his pocketbook and shoved it toward Cocu.

"No!" The latter shook his head vigorously. "I tell you I don't want money! I can get money in Antwerp—I have plenty of pals there. You, *monsieur,* must buy me a gun—I had to pawn mine, and I am a marked man. For me to appear at a gun-store—why I might as well call on the prefect himself! The same at any ticket-office. They are all watched. Buy me a good gun—and then a ticket—third-class—to Antwerp; *you* can do this in perfect safety. Take a taxicab, and hurry back here with both. I will wait for you."

Again Larocque went out to the street, assured himself that Lapierre was not yet in sight, signaled a cab, and inside of half an hour had presented Cocu with an automatic and an Antwerp *billet*. He insisted on adding a hundred francs for emergencies.

It was arranged that on the following night he was to dine at an obscure restaurant. When Lapierre showed up, Cocu undertook to kill him and make his getaway. He promised that he would not fail this time; no cigar-case should save his victim, "unless," grinned Cocu, "he wears it over his belly!" If Lapierre did not chance to follow Larocque that night, then he was to come on the next night. In no contingency should he himself be involved.

When Larocque finally left the oyster-house, he felt as if he had suddenly grown several years younger; and when later in the evening Lapierre picked him up at a cabaret, he felt almost kindly toward him, and accepted one of his thin black cigars.

The ensuing day Henri Larocque spent at his club. He had no stomach for seeing or conversing with Lapierre, who, having watched him enter the door, made no move to follow.

The hours dragged fretfully. He tried to read, smoked a deal too much, lunched with a chance acquaintance, dozed in a *fauteuil* through the endless afternoon. A little before eight he betook himself to the restaurant indicated by Cocu.

It was a quiet little place on a side street; there were but half a dozen customers scattered about the front of the room, and Larocque passed through to the last table, seated himself facing the door, and ordered a dinner he had no appetite for. Almost

immediately thereafter Lapierre sauntered in, and to his consternation took the seat directly opposite his own.

Larocque was in a panic. This was the very last thing he desired. If Cocu were to shoot Lapierre from behind, he ran a risk of killing Larocque as well. Even if he did not, he would probably be fairly spattered with Lapierre's life blood; besides, he felt that for him to be in his company on two successive occasions when his life was attempted, would have an ominous look.

Lapierre gave him no opportunity to evince his displeasure, but spoke at once.

"*Pardon, monsieur;* but I have some news which may interest you. Have you ever visited the morgue?"

"No! Certainly not."

"Nor do I—ordinarily. But I have just received word that there is a suicide there whose description tallies singularly with that of friend Cocu—*vache d'apache*—the man who shot me. I thought perhaps you might like to run over with me after dinner and see if it is indeed he."

Larocque started violently; and at this moment Cocu himself entered the restaurant and advanced toward their table. He was neatly dressed, and had shaved clean and discarded his spectacles. By his side trotted a little old gentleman in a frock-coat, bearing a black cloth bag. Unseen by Lapierre, they drew nearer and nearer their table; Larocque sitting as if paralyzed, deadly pale and with a cold perspiration starting on his forehead.

Arrived at the table, Cocu and the little old gentleman seated themselves. Lapierre glanced up, but paid no further attention to them.

"And now, M. Larocque," he said quietly, "I must trouble you to dictate to the notary"—he bowed to the little old gentleman, who bobbed his head in return and produced pad and pencil from the black bag—"the confession we once discovered."

With the struggle of a man emerging from a nightmare, Larocque at length found voice in a world which seemed to him to have become suddenly grotesque and impossible. He put forth his will as a drowning man clenches a plank.

"Will you be so good as to inform me why I should confess to—to anything?"

"From the point of view of sheer intelligence, M. Larocque. Let me recapitulate. I have here in my pocket a warrant for your arrest on the charge of conspiring to commit murder. It lacks merely the signature of a justice, which I can secure in precisely fifteen minutes."

"You can *never* prove that I have conspired to murder!" challenged Larocque.

Lapierre smiled.

"My dear *monsieur,* there never was so clear a case. Consider. You seek out this gentleman known for the time as 'Cocu'; you arrange with him to do me the honor to put me out of the way. Cocu—who is one of my coworkers—will testify to this. His companion, who secreted himself in the stall next to you, made a full record of your conversation. The chauffeur who took you to the shop where you purchased an automatic, and then to the Gare du Nord, where you bought an Antwerp ticket, together with the clerk and ticket-agent, will testify next in order.

Presently you return and deliver the gun—whose number was, of course, recorded by the clerk—and the ticket to Cocu, together with a hundred-franc note, all of which are marked as exhibits. You arrange to dine here at eight, in order that Cocu may shoot me. And it *is* eight—and here we all are! M. Larocque, let me earnestly assure you with the experience of many criminal trials, never have I known a chain of evidence whose every link has been so thoroughly tested!"

"But this—this Cocu—he is a criminal! No jury would accept his testimony! You know that he tried to kill you!"

"The good Cocu I must hasten to defend. He is what we term *un agent provocateur*—whose evidence, when properly corroborated, is perfectly admissible. What you pardonably mistook for a murderous assault was in reality but an instance of a certain boyish playfulness that alas! neither Cocu nor I has ever been able to outgrow. We discharged a few blank cartridges, and after a few days' absence—which I needed to attend to a little matter of my own—I showed you my metal cigar-case, at which

I had fired a low velocity bullet. I see now that I made my little joke too realistic; *monsieur* took it seriously. I owe him an apology. But you cannot very well use this episode as evidence, unless you at the same time admit all that you stand charged with in the warrant."

Larocque trembled with rage. With difficulty he composed himself.

"I cannot prevent you from ruining me by a contemptible trick," he said. "Why not serve your damned warrant and be done with it?"

Lapierre leaned toward him.

"*Monsieur,*" said he, "I have the utmost desire *not* to serve this warrant. The penalty for conspiracy to murder is, under French law, a minimum of twenty years in Cayenne. And twenty years there is—a life sentence. Nothing is deducted for good behavior—in Cayenne one either behaves, or dies.

"On the other hand, the penalty for the crime *monsieur* perpetrated in the affair of the Banc d'Afrique is only twelve years, in a French prison, with four off for good behavior. A return of all or part of the funds misappropriated would be available in mitigation of still more of the sentence. *Monsieur,* you are an intelligent man. I make no other appeal to you than to state the facts. Permit me to tear up the warrant which I draw from my pocket—and be so wise as to dictate to M. Forgues, the notary, your full confession, after reading which you will sign. 'Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay,' so to speak."

Presently Henri Larocque sighed deeply, and nodded his head. Scarcely had Lapierre begun to tear up the warrant than Larocque, in a steady voice, was dictating his confession to the little notary.

"And so you see," said Lapierre to me in conclusion, "Larocque confessed, although we had no evidence to convict him, and he knew it. And it was fear that swayed him; fear of something much worse than the sentence he received. I permitted him to present it as a voluntary statement which, with the return of all he had stolen, secured for him the minimum sentence. On his release, as he was ruined financially, and as his intelligence appealed to me, I procured him a berth in the *service de la sûreté.* We are excellent friends to-day."

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THE ALIEN NOTE

BY THEODOSIA GARRISON

OH, London Town, serene and gray,
Why is it, half a world away,
Some alien note, unknown, unguessed,
Wakes at your name within my breast,
And vague, strange memories start and stay?

Not mine the lesser lot to stray
Within your gates as strangers may;
Nor yet my feet your streets have pressed,
Oh, London Town!

Yet strangely native I as they,
Your children born within your sway;
I, who may never be your guest,
As close a tie as these possessed,
Surely, in some far yesterday,
Oh, London Town!

The Grouch

by E. J. Rath

Author of "Too Many Crooks," "When the Devil Was Sick," "Too Much Efficiency," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

WHEN the fishing season opened, John William Higgins was worried by the fear that some other fisherman would discover the lake on Pop Brundage's farm that for six summers he had considered his own. And when Mame Brundage—she was eighteen, a reader of the "society news in the Sunday supplements and preferred being called Marigold—visited him in his shack by the lakeside, she told him that a woman boarder was going to occupy the cottage near the farmhouse. When Miss Louise Dean arrived she said that she had come "in search of rest." Next day she met a man on his way to the Brundage home, who told her that he was Augustus J. Tilley, a naturalist. When she told him her name, he replied: "Certainly; of course"—which surprised her.

Mame had decided to marry a wealthy man. So when another guest—Mr. March, handsome and well groomed, but decidedly peevish—arrived and was assigned to the cabin on the hill, she thought that her *Prince Charming* had come. But March said that he had "come to be let alone," and soon earned the nickname of "the Grouch."

Tilley and Higgins had a hot argument about the relative merits of fishing and bug-hunting, and about which amusement was most likely to interest Miss Dean, who was very attractive to both. The fisherman thought that he had won, for she spent the next morning in his boat learning the art of bass fishing.

Mame decided that it was impossible that Mr. March did not love her, and stuck to that belief in spite of discouragements. He employed Knock, the mischievous young brother of Mame, to stir up trouble among the other boarders. One night, after Miss Dean caught her foot between the boards of a footbridge, and the Grouch, with very bad grace, helped her get free, Tilley seemed worried and sent two telegrams, but got no reply. Miss Dean won a fishing bet from the Grouch, but he didn't pay it.

Tilley rigged up a flash-light and a camera near a walk frequented by Miss Dean in the evening. Mame set off the flash—and swooned in the arms of the Grouch, who was prowling about. He thought that she was Miss Dean, and took her to the cottage.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARIGOLD'S TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE.

MISS DEAN said good night to Higgins at the edge of the cottage-porch. Entering the open doorway, she groped her path across the sitting-room to the mantelpiece, where she kept a box of matches.

She lighted a lamp, placed the chimney in position, and regulated the wick so that it would not smoke. Then she walked over to the mirror and surveyed herself, for she made it a habit, although not because of vanity, to keep in close touch with her personal appearance.

From the mirror she turned sharply, having seen another image beside her own.

Mame Brundage was sitting loosely in the rocker, blinking at the light. Her face was pale and puzzled.

"Well!" said Miss Dean. "Good evening."

Mame started at the voice, rose halfway from the chair and fell back weakly. She stared at the lady of the cottage as if the latter were a spook.

"What's the matter, Marigold?"

The occupant of the rocker gasped, rubbed her eyes slowly, and then rested a hand across her heart.

"Are you ill?"

Mame nodded, then shook her head.

"I'll get you a drink of water," said Miss Dean, entering the bedroom and returning with a pitcher and a glass.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for February 8.

Mame drank a mouthful and pushed the glass away. She tried to rise again, but was not yet ready for such effort.

"Sit still, Marigold, until you feel better. You'll be all right very soon."

"What—how did it happen?" asked Mame, in a shaky voice.

"I'm sure I don't know. We'll find out presently," said Miss Dean, with a reassuring smile. "Take your time."

"You—brought me—here?"

"I? Oh, no. I found you here. But it's all right; you're quite welcome."

Suddenly Mame began passing her hands over herself with cautious movements.

"I—I've been shot," she whispered.

"Shot? Let me see. Where have you been shot?"

"I don't know," wailed Mame.

Miss Dean made a quick survey and shook her head.

"You haven't been shot," she said. "You're perfectly sound. I'm sure of it. What makes you think you were shot?"

"I—I saw the flash. I heard it. And then it was all black again, and—"

"Where did this happen? Here?"

Mame shook her head.

"Up on the path — the path to the spring," she said.

Miss Dean wrinkled her forehead and became extremely attentive.

"Tell me about it, Marigold. Did you see anybody?"

"No, ma'am. I *felt* somebody!"

"It was dark, was it?"

"Terrible!"

"Tell me all you remember," commanded Miss Dean, drawing up a second chair and seating herself.

Mame did not remember much, but she told it with a native sense of dramatic values.

"And just as I felt somebody, they shot at me. And I cried aloud and swooned," she concluded, tragically.

"Squealed and flopped," nodded Miss Dean. "I understand. It's often done. Then how did you get here?"

The victim of the shooting shook her head helplessly.

"I guess I must have walked," she said. "I don't remember."

Miss Dean did not press that part of the inquiry. She knew that a lady in a faint does not walk, but it seemed unnecessary to acquaint Mame with that fact. She was more interested in another matter.

"What were you doing at the spring?" she asked.

Mame hesitated. Her wits had returned in full strength and she found the question somewhat difficult. If she told the truth she would be compelled to confess that her mission was one of espionage, and this would be embarrassing, particularly in the case of a person so downright as Miss Dean often was.

"I—I went to get a drink," she answered.

"Alone?"

"Of course!" Mame put indignation in her voice.

"Were you expecting to meet anybody?"

"Why, Miss Dean! You certainly surprise me."

Miss Dean smiled tolerantly.

"I didn't mean to, Marigold. Lots of girls meet their sweethearts at the trysting place. A rather nice custom, I always thought."

Mame flushed to a discernible degree.

"I have no sweetheart," she sighed.

"Never mind. You will have, I'm sure. We all do, at one time or another."

"How you talk!" exclaimed Mame, irrelevantly, as she studied this lady who had long before disclosed her vampirish habits.

"I've even been known to speak the truth," said Miss Dean, placidly. "You mustn't mind me, however. But let's get back to the adventure. You're sure you haven't left out anything?"

Mame spent a moment in thought, then shook her head.

"I can't remember anything more. It just scares one, doesn't it? When one's life is attempted one gets an awful shock. Don't you think so?"

Miss Dean now perceived that Mame was entirely recovered.

"Only I wish I knew how it happened," added the victim of the adventure, wistfully.

"I'll try to find out," said Miss Dean, rising.

She walked across the room and lifted a lantern from the nail where it hung. As she lighted it Mame watched with awed eyes.

"Where you goin'?" she asked breathlessly.

"Up to the place where you were shot."

Mame gasped.

"Alone?"

"Would you like to come?"

The daughter of the Brundage family shuddered; it was a genuine shudder.

"I wouldn't go up there for a million dollars!" she cried. "After what happened? And at night?"

"Then you stay here until I come back," instructed Miss Dean. "I don't believe I'll be long."

Miss Dean walked toward the door, lantern in hand.

"I—I've got to stay here alone?" asked Mame, anxiously.

"Unless you'd like to come."

Mame shook her head firmly.

"I'll stay here," she said. "I guess I ought to rest for a while, if you don't mind."

"An excellent idea, Marigold. Help yourself to a book. That one on the table, at your elbow, contains a very romantic love-story."

Mame picked up the book mechanically, but did not open it. She was too much overwhelmed by the brazen foolhardiness of the lady of the cottage.

Swinging her lantern, Miss Dean circled until she came to the rear of the cottage and then set out briskly along the path to the spring. She did not particularly enjoy her errand, for she was not an Amazon and she made no claim to any exceptional degree of intrepidity.

But she was extremely curious, and when curiosity gripped her it would have taken much to shake her determination. Mame's narrative was too incomplete to be satisfying. While she felt that her conjecture as to why Mame visited the spring was almost certainly correct, she had only a dim understanding of what happened afterward.

The white birches were ghostlike in the lantern light, and as the beacon moved onward their shadows marched in an opposite direction. A nervous person might easily have imagined that the shadows were making a stealthy détour, coming back into the path from behind, so that they could follow noiselessly and unseen.

But Miss Dean was not nervous; besides, she had a definite mission and she had no eyes for shadows. She was searching for objects.

She walked all the way to the spring without discovering anything that was unfamiliar, and now she began to have a suspicion that Mame had been romancing, or perhaps, to take a more kindly view, had been the victim of a nightmare. Helping herself to a dipperful of cool water, Miss Dean drank at the spring and then began the return journey, walking more slowly this time and allowing her glance to roam from side to side, as she followed the path.

In this manner her keen eyes presently discerned something they had missed on the outgoing trip. She stooped over and picked up the end of a piece of twine. It had not been severed cleanly, she observed, but had been broken, as the frayed end unmistakably disclosed.

To follow this clue was so simple that Miss Dean did it automatically. It led her to a tree, and there she found the other end of the twine attached to a metal contrivance that stood on a level with her head.

She lifted the lantern and studied the apparatus for several seconds, then touched it gingerly. A white, powdery substance clung to her finger-tips.

Standing on tiptoe, she sniffed cautiously. There was a burnt odor, faint but unmistakable.

Miss Dean smiled, turned away from the tree and began looking elsewhere. Her search was a short one. Peering remorselessly at her over the top of a bush was the eye of a camera.

She walked carefully around the machine and approached it from the rear, where she held up the lantern for better examination. It took but a moment to discover that the camera contained a plate-holder, from which the slide had been drawn. And then she discovered the slide itself, laid across the top of the box.

She put down the lantern, reached for

the slide and examined it in the light. It was slightly damp from dew and she dried it carefully with a handkerchief. Then, with cautious hands, she inserted the edge of the slide in the plate-holder and shoved it slowly home, snapping the catch into place.

After that it was safe to remove the holder from the camera, and she did so, feeling quite happy over the fact that she had once dabbled in amateur photography.

Picking up her lantern, Miss Dean went down the path in the direction of the cottage, humming softly and smiling to herself. Before she entered the dwelling she slipped the plate-holder into a generous pocket of the coat she wore.

Mame Brundage had not moved from the rocking-chair, nor had she opened the book. She was staring fearfully at the door as Miss Dean put down the lantern.

"What—what was it?" she asked in a loud whisper.

Miss Dean smiled and shook her head.

"Didn't you find anything?" Mame demanded.

"I want to ask you, Marigold, if you ever walk in your sleep?"

"Who? Me?" Mame showed traces of alarm.

Miss Dean nodded.

"Why, I never walked in my sleep in all my life!"

"How do you know?"

Mame paused, for the question raised a point she had never considered. True, how did she know?

"I suppose you dream sometimes," said Miss Dean.

"Ye-es, I dream quite a lot. Only—only you don't mean to say I dreamt that, Miss Dean?"

"It seems quite possible you may have."

Mame stared and shook her head.

"It was just too real," she affirmed, earnestly. "Why, I tell you I *felt* somebody! And then the flash, and the shootin', and me going into a swoon!"

"Dreams are often extremely real to us," observed Miss Dean. "Isn't it possible you might have sat in that rocker and dreamed it all?"

"It 'd scare me to death if I believed that, Miss Dean. I wouldn't ever go to sleep again. Didn't you find anything at all?"

"Nothing unusual, Marigold."

"Nothin' strange?"

Miss Dean shook her head. Mame received this intelligence with a troubled frown. Then she made a stubborn gesture of dissent.

"Well, I wouldn't expect the ones that tried to kidnap me to be hangin' around, Miss Dean. Would you? If somethin' scared 'em they'd run away, wouldn't they?"

"It sounds likely, I'll admit," said Miss Dean, gravely. "That is, provided they were trying to kidnap you."

"What else could it have been?" demanded Mame. "You take a girl who has sent her photograph to a movin'-picture magazine, like me. Now I can see how foolish I was. How do I know where the picture went?

"It never got to the magazine, because they didn't print it. They printed lots of others that weren't near so good, and that proves they never got it, don't it? I dare say it was stole out of the mail."

As Mame developed this theory, which had but just occurred to her, she showed an enthusiasm that almost brought a sparkle to her dull eyes.

"There's an awful lot of mail-robbin', you know," she went on. "And my picture had the name and address on it. Now I'm beginnin' to understand it all, Miss Dean.

"Ain't it terrible when you think how many girls has probably been kidnaped that way? When they see a picture they like they don't stop at anything. It frightens one, doesn't it?"

"It certainly does, Marigold," assented Miss Dean.

"It's gettin' so a girl don't dare to have a personality," declared Mame warmly.

Miss Dean glanced at the clock on the shelf and yawned.

"I think it's bedtime for both of us," she said.

Mame jumped to her feet and became anxious again.

"And I've got to go all the way over to the house," she faltered.

"I'll see you home," said Miss Dean.

Mame looked her gratitude and accepted the escort with alacrity. As they crossed the meadow to the farmhouse the heroine of the kidnaping made constant and voluminous observations on the perils of beauty.

Miss Dean left her at the farmhouse.

"I wish you would tell your father, Marigold," she said, "that I want to go down to the village after breakfast to-morrow. I can drive myself. Do you suppose he can spare Sally and the buckboard?"

"Sure," said Mame. "Maybe mom 'll want some errands done, anyhow."

"I'll be glad to attend to them. Good night."

"Good night, Miss Dean. I don't expect you'll be runnin' any risk goin' back to the cottage, will you?"

"Old women are never kidnaped, Marigold. Besides, they haven't seen my picture."

As Mame went up-stairs to her room she began to understand why Miss Dean enjoyed such reassuring immunity.

"When you ain't beautiful," she thought, "it's sort of made up to you in a feelin' that you're safe."

So it came about that Miss Dean drove Sally to the village in the morning, where she spent most of the forenoon, doing errands for Mrs. Brundage, while the local photographer developed a plate and made a print.

The print was still damp when she called for it. She did not wait for it to dry, but carried it away, packed between two pieces of blotting-paper. She took the negative, too.

The print proved to be excellent. Miss Dean studied it several times on the way home, and each time she smiled. She was singing when she reached the farm.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GROUCH DOES SOME THINKING.

MYSTERY and suspicion contributed to produce a state of instability in the atmosphere at the Brundage place. The person least affected by this condition was Miss Dean who, besides being self-contained and capable of looking out for herself, had the advantage of knowing certain things that others did not.

She knew, for instance, much more about what happened to Mame than Mame did herself. There was only one point on which, for a time, she was unable to shed an explanation with any degree of certainty. Early in the morning, before going over to the house for breakfast, she took the walk to the spring, and learned that there had been a complete removal of all exhibits.

The camera, the tripod and the flash-light apparatus had disappeared. Even the tell-tale string was gone.

It was not until the middle of the day that Miss Dean obtained an explanation concerning the photographic outfit, although by that time she had rather definite notions on the subject, growing out of a thoughtful analysis of the whole situation. She met Knock Brundage and, being a fairly good diagnostician, she reached the conclusion that he was suffering the pangs that can come only from a pent-up secret.

"What's on your mind, Knock?" she asked.

"Nothin'," he answered.

Knock had recently met Mr. Tilley, who cautioned him in the most solemn manner to say nothing whatever about the bear, inasmuch as he had not yet been able to obtain the necessary photograph.

Knock, with his heart set upon the ultimate success of the enterprise, promised to say nothing, not even to his father, who had a gun that would kill the bear at a prodigious distance, no matter how large the unfortunate animal might be.

"Little boys must never tell fibs to people who can look right inside their heads," chided Miss Dean.

Knock regarded her with sudden awe.

"You lookin' inside my head now?" he asked.

"Yes, my dear. And I should hate to tell your father some of the things I see."

"Aw, I ain't been doin' nothin', Miss Dean."

"Then what troubles you so much?"

He stirred uneasily and dug a bare toe into the ground.

"You scared of bears?" he demanded suddenly, looking up at her.

"Oh, yes, indeed."

"I ain't," he declared. "They's a bear round here, but I ain't scared of him."

"Of course not. You're a boy, and boys are never afraid, like girls and women. Have you seen the bear?"

"No, ma'am. But Mr. Tilley—"

Knock hesitated guiltily as the name passed his lips.

"Yes?" said Miss Dean, encouragingly.

"Well, he's seen where it makes tracks in the ground."

"How wonderful! Is he going to kill it?"

"No, ma'am. At any rate, he ain't goin' to kill it right off. He's goin' to make a picture of it first. Then maybe my pop 'll kill it."

Miss Dean nodded in a satisfied manner, of which Knock took no notice.

"An' if you're scared of bears," he added, warningly, "you better keep away from that walk up by the spring, 'cause that's where its picture is goin' to be took."

Miss Dean knew all that she wished and began a significant examination of the contents of her purse.

"Say, I promised not to say nothin'," remarked Knock. "You ain't goin' to tell Mr. Tilley I told you?"

"Of course not. It's a secret between us. And you really didn't tell me anything, Knock, because I saw it right inside your head all the time."

Knock stared at her with uneasy eyes, then put on his hat and pulled it down over his ears. He did not omit, however, to take what she offered, and if it was only a dime he consoled himself with the thought that he really had not told her anything she did not already know.

Having thus obtained confirmation of a suspicion, Miss Dean retired to the cottage, so that she might give uninterrupted consideration to several circumstances that had recently come to her notice. She wanted, if possible, to set one thing into its correct relation with another and thus discover what it was all about.

Tilley, the naturalist, was in an unusually disturbed state of mind. He had set a trap, only to discover that it had been sprung without catching anything. What mystified him, of course, was the fact that an essential part of the trap had been carried away.

He asked Knock particularly if he had revisited the scene and had been assured, with complete truthfulness, that he had not been near it since the night before. If the plate-holder and its contents had not been missing Tilley would have been inclined to persist in the experiment; but there was something uncanny and even sinister in the disappearance, particularly when taken into account with the fact that the flash had been fired.

Not feeling that he was in a position to make inquiries, the naturalist kept his own counsel; but it was a restless counsel, shadowed by a consciousness that the watcher was watched.

The Grouch had certain theories of his own concerning the affair of the birch wood. He guessed, correctly enough, what the blinding flash had meant, but he could not be certain as to the author of it, unless it was Miss Dean herself, who was the most frequent user of the spring walk, in which she had come to assume a sort of proprietary interest.

Just what she intended to photograph he had not the least idea. It struck him as rather a grim joke that she had fallen a victim to her own preparations. When he reflected upon that for a while, it occurred to him as quite unlikely that she would forget having set such a trap, so that he wound up by doubting whether she had anything whatever to do with it.

That, of course, reopened the whole field of speculation again.

One thing only he blamed himself for—he had failed to return to the spot after leaving the lady at her cottage. Such a visit undoubtedly would have cleared up everything. As things stood now, he could only await developments, and he did not await them with equanimity.

He was standing in the orchard when Miss Dean returned from her trip to the village and he heard her singing as the buckboard passed along the road. It was clear that she had made a complete recovery, a fact that surprised him somewhat

when he recalled the utter collapse of the lady in the wood.

"Iron nerve!" he muttered, as the song grated on his ears. "Hanged if I'll pay her a hundred dollars! She bilked me."

From which it will be seen that the Grouch had something else on his mind beside the episode of the night before.

Mame Brundage arrived at the cabin with his dinner-tray and found him moodily pacing the floor. It was her first glimpse of him that day; breakfast had been left on the door-step, in response to an order bellowed from behind a closed door. She smiled wanly at him.

"You came near not gettin' your dinner," she said as she placed the tray on the table; "or any breakfast, either."

"Just as soon miss 'em," said the Grouch as he snatched the napkin from the tray and surveyed what lay beneath. "What's the matter with the food here? Has the stove got dyspepsia?"

But Mame was not to be driven off at a tangent.

"Ain't you heard about last night?"

He drew a chair to the table and shook his head as he sat down.

"I was kidnaped," said Mame.

The Grouch studied her with a cold glance.

"If you were kidnaped, what are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Of course, I wasn't exactly kidnaped, Mr. March. I got away afterward."

He scowled at his plate.

"Never saw such a place for inefficiency," he said sourly. "Nothing done more than half-way. They don't even have decent kidnapers."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mame, who did not fail to interpret his meaning, even if it shocked her. "Oh, Mr. March! You don't mean to be cruel like that."

"Who says I don't?"

"I just won't believe it," she said, shaking her head sadly. "Because I know you've got a heart that's big and kind."

"Cut out the rot," he ordered. "What about this kidnaping stuff? Who tried it? Are there any lunatics at large?"

"If you're goin' to insult me," answered Mame stiffly, "I'll go away."

"You never did yet," said the Grouch in a tone of brutal incredulity. "Go ahead and tell what happened."

Mame settled herself in a chair and clasped her hands.

"Well, I'd been takin' a walk up to the spring. Maybe you know where it is. It's up back of Miss Dean's cottage. The water up there is very beneficial. We had a gentleman here once who said there was a great deal of iron in it. You wouldn't think there could be iron in water, would you?

"Mom don't like it as good as the well water, but pop drinks it whenever he ain't too tired to go up there. Mom says that's what gives him lumbago. They have terrible arguments about it. He says if there's any iron in it, it ought to stren'then his back, but mom says—"

The Grouch stopped her with a glare.

"Cut out the prologue," he ordered. "What about the kidnaping?"

"I'm comin' to it," said Mame. "Only I just wanted to say that mom says that iron gets into your system and stiffens it all up so that it's hard for you to bend over, which is the kind of trouble pop mostly has.

"Of course, one can have one's own opinion about that. But as I was sayin', I went up there by the spring, and this kidnapin' happened when I was on my way back."

She paused and rolled her eyes upward, only resuming her narrative at his sharp command.

"The first thing I knew—it was terrible dark in that path—my foot caught against something, and I lost my balance."

The Grouch dropped his knife with a clatter and turned quickly.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"I lost my balance," repeated Mame, "and I fell over against—what do you think—right there in the dark? A *man!*"

The Grouch's face turned an alarming shade of red.

"And then somebody else shot at me, and I swooned away."

A paroxysm seized the Grouch.

He pushed back his chair and rose from the table, holding his napkin to his lips.

"You're chokin' on somethin'," said Mame in sudden anxiety. "Wait till I get you a glass of water."

He waved her aside and walked over to the window, where he stood with his back toward her. For several seconds he felt as if his head were revolving on his shoulders. It had been Mame Brundage he carried to the cottage!

The revelation not only shocked but disgusted him. Had he but known that last night, Mame would have lain in the path until the snow covered her, for all he would have done to preserve her.

He had actually carried this gangling and garrulous affliction all the way down to the cottage—in his arms! Ugh!

"Is your chokin' better?" inquired Mame gently. "That's good. I just knew you had a kind heart, Mr. March. I knew when you heard what happened you'd be affected by it. Aren't you?"

The Grouch nodded, but did not look at her.

"The next thing I remember, I was sittin' in the cottage, and Miss Dean was talkin' to me. It seems she came in and found me sittin' there. I wasn't any more surprised than she was."

Mame rambled along with the remainder of her story, to which the Grouch listened as if it were the memory of a bad dream. The only part to which he paid close attention was Mame's recital of how Miss Dean made a journey out into the darkness in order to investigate.

"You say she didn't find anything?" he asked as he slowly rallied himself.

"Not a thing," said Mame. "Of course, I ain't sure she went all the way up the path to where it happened. She said she did, but you know how it is with some women. My idea, when I come to think it over, is that she was scared to go all the way, but just let on that she did so I'd think she was braver than me."

The Grouch was not at all sure about that. He was speculating as to what Miss Dean might have found.

"The more I see of her, the more strange she is," added Mame. "I suppose you knew she was a vampire, didn't you? Oh, yes; she confessed that.

"She didn't admit it in so many words, but it was easy enough to tell. But you've met her, so I suppose you know."

"How's that?" he demanded.

"Oh, I heard about your meetin' her," said Mame in a tone of soft reproach. "You never said anything about it, but I heard it. You met her up to the lake, with Mr. Higgins, and you met her yesterday up to the millpond. That makes twice."

The Grouch breathed again. For a moment he feared that Mame had heard of another meeting.

"It's nothin' to me, you understand," continued Mame with a shrug. "Only—well, I think when people get well acquainted they ought not to start in keepin' things from each other. I never keep anything from you."

"Good Heaven! Don't I know it?" he groaned.

Mame had tried to bring to her eyes that soul-stirred expression she had seen so often on the picture-screen at Hurleyville; but at the Grouch's heartless comment she abandoned the effort.

"I expect you think it was bold of me to say that," she declared as she rose primly from her chair. "Maybe it sounded that way, but it wasn't meant to be. If there's one thing nobody can accuse me of, it's boldness.

"I never force myself on people. When one understands what's proper and what isn't, one isn't liable to make mistakes like that. If my comp'ny annoys you, I'll go."

She walked stiffly to the table and picked up the tray.

"I suppose you're finished with your dinner?" she said coldly.

"Take it away."

She went as far as the door-step and paused, irresolute.

"I'll be sharp on time with your supper," she said in a voice suddenly softened. "I ain't mad with you, Mr. March. Honest! I know you mean right."

The Grouch threw out his arms in a wild gesture and then gripped his hair with both hands, tugging until his scalp ached and his teeth gritted in sheer pain.

"Lord, what a mess!" he exclaimed as Mame passed beyond the range of hearing.

"Am I an idiot? I am! What did I come here for? Why didn't I have sense enough to go away in the beginning? I'll go tomorrow."

A pause. "No, I won't. They won't drive me out. I'll stay to the finish. I'll show 'em!"

When he considered matters more calmly, he was not so certain about showing them, particularly Miss Dean. That lady was causing him certain anxiety of mind. He would have given much to know just what she learned as a result of her trip to the scene of last night's misadventure; for he had not the least doubt that she had investigated the matter thoroughly.

"She'd do it in a holy minute," he reflected. "She's got a nerve as cold as ice."

What troubled him most of all was what the camera did. He did not even have the satisfaction of knowing whether it did anything at all. If it had—Lord! And who had the photograph?

The Grouch pondered that last question for a long and disquieting time.

"I may pay that hundred yet," he muttered.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN IMPORTANT CONVERSATION.

FOR two days there had been turmoil at the farm in place of its wonted calm. It began with the spreading of the tale of Mame's kidnaping. Mrs. Brundage ordered her daughter not to leave the house after dark, while Knock was instructed not to be at large later than sundown. Both Mame and her brother offered riotous resistance to the ruling and violated it by stealth.

Subsequent discovery meant that Knock had his trousers dry-cleaned with a strap, while Mame was told that the next time she planned to go to Hurleyville she could stay at home.

Pop Brundage spent a whole evening in the birch-grove, cuddling a shotgun in the hollow of his arm and creating such general disquiet that none dared to take the walk to the spring except Miss Dean, who, being a woman, was not suspected as a kidnaper.

All that Pop got for his vigil was a fresh attack of lumbago, and after that he did not care what happened to anybody.

Mr. Higgins and Mr. Tilley nearly fought on two occasions, being separated once by Miss Dean, who was the cause of their argument, and once by Mame, who said that she would tell Miss Dean all about it—an announcement that proved to have an equally quelling effect.

It seemed that the settling of a score between the fisherman and the naturalist was merely being postponed, however, for each still vowed that he would have the satisfaction which it is the duty of a gentleman to exact.

Miss Dean acquired a sudden fondness for the seclusion of her cottage, from which she rarely emerged except for meals. This had the unfortunate result of compelling Higgins and Tilley to seek her at the same place, and, as each was diligent in this pursuit, there was constant electrification of the atmosphere.

Last of all, the Grouch added to the turmoil. There were times when he seemed to have gone berserk, so that it was only after screwing her courage to a high point that Mame carried the meals to the cabin. He had an alarming way of slashing about him with a cane and of bestowing glances of intense ferocity upon all whom he encountered.

He spoke very little, and what he did say was not infrequently of a profane character. Even Mrs. Brundage was afraid of him.

As before, he walked at night, having notified Pop Brundage that if he attempted any marksmanship with the shotgun there would be damages as well as the devil to pay, with probably a jail sentence thrown in.

What the Grouch wanted was information, and he wanted it badly; but the person who seemed most likely to be in a position to furnish it was the very last he would seek.

He still kept a gloomy eye upon the comings and goings of Miss Dean, but at a distance that precluded any possibility of

an encounter. It remained for Knock Brundage, without being aware of it, to supply the missing knowledge.

Toward midafternoon of the second unhappy day Knock arrived at the cabin with a flat bundle concealed inside his shirt. He closed the door behind him before producing the mysterious article from its hiding-place.

"You wanta look at somethin'?" he asked cautiously.

"What is it?" asked the Grouch.

"A book."

"Take it away. I don't want to read."

"It's Mame's book," observed Knock.

"I don't care whose it is."

"It ain't a regular book," explained Knock as he unwrapped a covering of oilcloth. "I mean it ain't printed and it ain't got pictures in it. It's a book she writes in."

The Grouch walked over to the table and glanced at the sacred volume.

"Where did you get it?" he demanded.

"Found it. I been lookin' for it lots o' times, but I only found it to-day. Mame she's been hidin' it diff'rent places. She's been lyin' about it, too; she said there wasn't no such book. But I knew better. Every now an' then she sneaks off an' writes in it. She uster keep it in the stone wall, down by the orchard, but she took it away from there, an' now she keeps it up in the woods. I followed her to-day, an' after she got through writin' in it an' hid it again I went an' got it."

Even then the Grouch did not evince any great interest.

"You'd better put it back," he said sharply.

"I can't read it very good," said Knock, unabashed. "She don't write plain. But you can read it if you wanta. It says things about you in it."

The Grouch became instantly alert.

"What about me?" he demanded.

"Oh, I dunno. It don't make no sense, I guess."

The Grouch picked up the book, drew a chair close to a window, and sat down. For several minutes he thumbed pages rather carelessly, hastily turning them over whenever he discovered bursts of sentimentality and uttering snorts of disdain as he spurned them.

Then came a page that dealt with certain events at the farm since his own arrival, and the Grouch read more slowly. Once he turned a fiery red and swore, and after that he read every mutilated and tottering word.

The sense of being a trespasser vanished from his mind; he became a ruthless seeker of fact. It was not news to the Grouch that he was beloved of Mame Brundage, although it was disconcerting to see the matter set forth boldly in black and white; but Mame's record of observation concerning other persons at the farm supplied him with a good deal of fresh material for thought, and his absorption in this was complete.

And then he came to the wail of an anguished heart:

He has bit the hand that feeds him. He has ofered me an insult. To-day I told him how I was kidnapd and he said althow not in these exact words that he wished it had been done better. He ment by that he wished I was gone forever. It was a stab that went to my hart. I must of done something to ofend him. What ah what can I have done? And yet I forgive him for when one is a woman one must forgive. Something in my hart tells me he does not mean all this cruelness.

The Grouch sneered and turned another page.

"Say, what's it about?" asked Knock.

"Nothing. Shut up," commanded the Grouch.

And then he reached a passage that set him on the edge of his chair.

I hav been in his arms and what more can I ever ask. It was him who rescued me. He is my preserver, And all his cruelty was just ment to hide it from me. Can it be that he loves me in secret. Yes it must be. I am scared of the way my hart is beating. I was in his arms and I dident know it. Oh how cruel is fate.

"How the devil did she find out?" muttered the Grouch uneasily. "I suppose our friend in the cottage has been filling her head full of rot. She's capable of it."

He read again:

There is a picture with me in his arms but it is in the hands of another. Ah to think that our love shoud be known in a public way.

Perspiration moistened the Grouch's forehead, and he mopped it away as he continued:

I found the picture to-day as I was looking through the draws in her bureau. It shows me and my dear one in the forest right at the place where they kidnapd me. It shows us both plain. He is standing there brave and nobel defying them to do their wurst with his eyes all blazing with fire. And I am in his arms leaning agenst his brest. You can see my face sideways and nobody could make a mistake. It seems they took a picture while they were trying to steel me away from him. He has both arms around me but mainly his left which suports me. I am helpless but safe. O what happyness. What is she doing with the picture. How did she get it. I supose she is in leeg with them. All the time she must of known about it but she kept on deceeving me. She is dubble faced beside a vampire. I must be on my gard but he will protect me even if I fail. I did not dare keep the picture so I put it back. But I will look at it agen to-morrow when I am going threw her bureau draws agen and some day it may yet be mine. I wonder when will he speak to me of our love. It cannot be long now. Im going to watch his eyes closer after this for they say their is where it shows first. I am sad but happy. I hope the picture makes her jellus.

It was the last entry in the book, and the Grouch closed the volume and sat staring out of the window.

"You got it all read?" demanded Knock.

The Grouch started and remembered that another was present. Carrying the book over to the table, he rewrapped it in its oilcloth cover.

"I want you to take this back where you found it," he said.

"Aw, gee! I was goin' to keep it," complained Knock.

"You will do nothing of the kind. It does not belong to you. It is the property of your sister, and she must never find out that you carried it away."

The Grouch spoke sternly, and the Brundage child was impressed.

"You must put it back exactly as you found it, and you must never tell your sister that you know anything about it. You must never tell her that you brought it to me. Understand?"

"What's in it?" asked Knock.

"Nothing of importance; nothing that would interest you at all. It's mostly about sewing and cooking and housework."

The Grouch produced some change from his pocket.

"And don't ever take it away again," he commanded. "Unless I tell you to."

Knock took the book and hid it inside his shirt, after which he counted the change.

"Will you want it again to-morrer?" he inquired.

"If I do, I'll let you know. Hurry now, and don't let your sister discover that it was taken away."

Knock went away with the book. He knew from the stealth with which Mame persistently hid it that there was something of merit about it. Now he understood. It was a money-getter.

Standing in front of the only mirror the cabin afforded, the Grouch studied himself carefully. He decided to change his necktie. While selecting another one, he decided to change his shirt. While he was choosing a soft silk affair, with purple stripes, he decided to change his clothes. So it was altogether something like fifteen minutes before he was ready to leave his cabin.

"It simply must be done," he said grimly as he strode forth.

There was a short cut to the cottage that avoided the farmhouse and the meadow, and he chose it. The way was familiar enough; it formed a part of his nightly round.

He walked briskly, for his mind was made up, and there was nothing to ponder about between the cabin and the cottage.

Nobody was on the porch, so he rapped sharply on the steps with his cane.

"Who is it?" called a voice.

"Me."

"Who?"

"Mr. March."

"Oh. Take a seat, please. I'll be out directly."

He did not take a seat, but stood sternly at the foot of the steps, waiting.

It was nearly half an hour before Miss Dean appeared. As soon as the Grouch had announced himself she consulted her mirror. After a brief study she decided to put on a pink dress. Having selected the pink dress, she decided that her hair ought to be done over.

By the time her hair suited her, she decided to change her shoes and stockings. All these things and others, including a little touch of powder and the manipulation of a nail buffer, took time; and whatever time was necessary Miss Dean took.

Then she went out on the porch.

The Grouch dropped his watch back into his pocket and looked at her coldly.

"You wished to see me?" she asked, returning his glance evenly.

"It has become necessary," said the Grouch.

"What a double misfortune! Shall we be brief?"

"Very."

"Good! Begin."

Miss Dean seated herself, but she did not again invite him to find a chair. He remained standing on the grass, with his heels clicked precisely together.

"I've come for that picture," he said. Then he added quickly: "And don't answer by saying 'What picture?'"

"I wasn't going to," said Miss Dean. "The picture is conceded. It's excellent, too."

"I want the negative, also," he continued.

"Yes; there is a negative," she admitted.

"And I want any and all prints that have been made."

Miss Dean nodded and devoted herself to a study of the Grouch's scarf.

"I want them now, if you please."

She tapped her slipper on the porch floor and smiled.

"At least, you talk to the point," she said. "You just want one thing after another, don't you?"

"I do," he answered without flinching.

"Well, now here's what *I* want," said Miss Dean. "I want to keep the picture, and the negative, and any and all prints."

"Why?"

She studied his silk shirt.

"Why?" he repeated.

"Reasons not stated," she said.

"Blackmail?"

She laughed.

"You're making many suggestions, Mr. March."

"The picture is not yours, and you've no right to it," he observed, controlling his voice.

"Is it yours?"

"I'm concerned in it."

"Yes; prominently," she agreed.

The Grouch winced.

"Let me see it," he commanded.

Miss Dean shook her head.

"Not at present," she said.

"When?"

"Really I cannot tell. I haven't got that far."

"What's the price?"

"I haven't thought of that, either. You get ahead very rapidly."

"Well, I'll pay that bet. Only you're not entitled to it, for it wasn't a legitimate one."

Miss Dean laughed outright.

"But you're going to pay that anyhow," she said.

"Don't be sure. And I'll throw in that pair of slippers."

"But I'm going to get those anyhow. I had already decided to tell you that I'd accept them."

He shook his head impatiently.

"Come, then; name your price. How much money—cold cash?"

"Make a bid," she suggested.

"The price!" he said, rapping his cane on the step.

"I can't name it until I know the value. I'm not at all sure what it's worth." She spoke thoughtfully. "And it may take me some time to learn."

"How do you mean, to learn?"

She shrugged and looked mysterious.

The Grouch viewed her with a fixed stare, and she met it without wavering.

"Well, I won't stand here haggling," he said abruptly.

"I was sure you wouldn't."

"But I want to serve notice on you that I propose to get that picture."

"Service acknowledged," she said with a nod.

"Meantime, I shall ask one thing."

"Yes?"

"I want your word that you will show it to nobody until we have talked further about it, and that you will keep it in a place where nobody is likely to find it."

Miss Dean considered briefly.

"Very well; I promise that."

The Grouch bowed stiffly and turned away.

"A moment, please," she called.

He halted.

"It's about that bet. Would you mind letting me have a check rather soon?"

He tightened his lips and did not answer.

"I could use it nicely," she explained. "But, of course, don't pinch yourself. The slippers can wait until later. And by the way, Mr. March—don't you think it rather remarkable that I never asked you how you knew I had the picture?"

But the Grouch was in motion again, and if he heard the question he ignored it. Miss Dean sat on the porch, humming as she watched him striding away toward the cabin.

She had the air of an indolent and contented woman.

"To think that we both dressed up for this," she mused. "Still, I'm glad of it. I think it gave the interview a certain distinction."

She went inside and walked directly to her bureau. Pulling out one of the drawers, she pushed aside some garments and lifted out picture and negative. As she studied the print her eyes were merry.

"I'd like to be sure how he learned about it," she murmured. "It was careless of me to leave it here. I must find a better place—somewhere away from my clothes would be best. One's clothes are such an attraction. They give one such an air of refinement, don't you think? I do. When I was down to Hurleyville—"

Miss Dean burst out laughing.

"Poor old Grouch!" she exclaimed.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PROPOSAL FROM TILLEY.

AUGUSTUS J. TILLEY beat John William Higgins to it. It seemed to him that it was a matter of necessity as well as of inclination. The fisherman was altogether too persistent in his neglect of the bass and his attentions to Miss Louise Dean.

It was the most desultory fishing season that Higgins ever spent at the Brundage farm, although he did not himself realize it. Tilley, however, had steadily observed that the lure of the lake was losing potency, and he did not like to contemplate possible consequences.

He dressed himself with a care worthy of the Grouch. Even then he was garbed in rusty black, and his string tie was knotted with the slovenly precision of a Carolina statesman; yet it was a sartorial debauch for Tilley, and he was keenly conscious of the fact. He even changed his shoes, and borrowed stove-polish from Mrs. Brundage in order to beautify his new footgear.

For matters had come to a desperate pass with the naturalist, and he was thrown entirely upon his own resources. None of his outbound telegrams and letters had been answered; there was none to whom he might go for counsel. So he decided to play a man's part in the world and carve the future according to his own pattern.

Miss Dean was not at the cottage when he called after supper, and he set out along the path to the spring. It was a shrewd guess, for he found her there, sitting with her back against a tree and enjoying the early dusk.

"I hope I don't intrude," said Tilley.

"Impossible," she said cordially.

Tilley seated himself opposite her somewhat uneasily, for his figure did not lend itself to graceful attitudes.

"A wonderful evening," said Miss Dean, whose keen eyes had already discerned improvements in his costume.

"Very fine," agreed Tilley.

"And how are the insects?"

He started at this unexpected inquiry, for it was a long time since he had given insects any thought.

"I didn't come to talk about insects," he said recklessly.

"Then I am afraid you are fickle, Mr. Tilley. When you first came, you know, you were extremely diligent."

"Things have changed," he said solemnly.

"Why?"

He moved restlessly. He felt that fate was urging him more rapidly than he count-

ed upon; he did not like to have the matter taken wholly out of his hands.

"For various reasons," he answered inanely.

"That's almost as bad as saying 'because,'" observed Miss Dean with a faint smile.

Tilley breathed deeply. He felt that it was imperative to resume the initiative.

"Insects," he said, "are no longer my chief pursuit in life."

Miss Dean smoothed her skirt and sighed. There were times when she had an intuition that was something more than human.

"And what is now your chief pursuit?" she murmured.

Tilley took his courage in both hands and plunged.

"You," he said.

Miss Dean looked up at the pink sky and said never a word.

"Yes, Miss Dean—you!" he repeated, emboldened by her silence.

She was thinking of the photograph and of several other things, trying to obtain the true perspective of the present onslaught. Tilley coughed behind his hand and made a fresh start.

"All I think about is you," he said, with a hint of pathos in his voice.

"I'm sure it's very kind of you," she murmured.

"I have a very high regard for you, Miss Dean."

"I thank you."

"It gets stronger every day," he said desperately.

"You honor me, Mr. Tilley."

There was something in his expression that reminded her of the first day they met—a startled look that mingled surprise with recognition. Miss Dean studied it curiously.

"I—I—" He paused and swallowed painfully. "I make a modest living, Miss Dean."

She had her lip between her teeth.

"But I am a man of economical habits. Yes, ma'am. I always put a little aside."

"It's an excellent rule," she said.

"I've got three—three thousand dollars in the bank!" he said explosively.

"Why, I think that's perfectly fine!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands.

"And it's all yours, Miss Dean."

"Mine! How can that be possible? I don't understand, Mr. Tilley."

He eyed her solemnly, nodding his head with slow emphasis.

"All yours," he repeated. "You can do whatever you like with it."

"That's very generous of you, but still I don't understand. Probably I'm very stupid."

He made an emphatic gesture of dissent.

"You're not stupid at all," he assured her. "You're—you're—a shining light!"

"Oh, but that's a perfectly beautiful compliment!" she exclaimed. "And it makes one so happy when one receives a compliment, don't you think? I do."

She said this with the utmost gravity, and Tilley nodded his head mechanically. He was still struggling, but his spirit was undaunted.

"What I meant, Miss Dean," he burst out, "is that you can spend it any way you like—after we're married."

There! He had made the matter plain at last, although he was alarmed at his own intrepidity.

Miss Dean studied her hands as they lay in her lap. She noted an emerald ring on one finger and turned it about so that the stone was hidden. Then she looked up at him.

"I had never thought about that," she said softly. "I didn't know we were to be married."

He blushed slowly, and began snapping the kunckle-joints on one hand, a proceeding that caused her to wince as each joint clicked sharply.

"I think maybe I've got it wrong," he faltered. "What I mean is, I didn't start exactly right. I intended to ask you to marry me first, and then I was coming to the other matters."

She nodded understandingly.

"I'm an impulsive man," he added. "I sometimes speak without thinking."

Miss Dean straightened up and looked at him severely.

"I think perhaps that is what is the matter," she said coldly.

He looked at her pleadingly and shook his head.

"I haven't got it right yet," he said sadly. "I'm confused, I think. You see, this is the first time I ever asked anybody to marry me. I hope you won't take any offense."

Miss Dean relented and gave him a kindly smile as she shook her head.

"That's not an offense to any woman, Mr. Tilley."

"I'm glad you look at it that way. And —and I'm willing to give up the insects."

She bent her head again and raised her handkerchief to her lips.

"You don't like them, so I'll give them up—forever," he reiterated. "I'm not the kind to let insectivora stand between us."

At this renunciation Miss Dean's body shook.

"It's all because I love you," he added simply.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "At last!"

He looked at her in sudden alarm.

"Have—have I said anything wrong?" he asked.

"On the contrary, you've just reached the beginning," she answered faintly.

He knotted his hands together and squinted at them in a puzzled way.

"How do you mean—the beginning?"

"Well, it's usually done this way: first, you say you love her; second, you ask her to marry you; third, you offer to sacrifice everything for her; fourth, you lay all your worldly goods at her feet."

Tilley sighed and nodded.

"Then I got it all backward," he confessed humbly. "I'm sorry I spoiled it. I meant it all in the best way. But—"

He looked up at her suddenly.

"I guess you've been proposed to before, haven't you?" he asked.

Miss Dean looked at him with an expression of alarm.

"Well, I should *hope* so!" she exclaimed.

"I might have guessed it," he said mournfully. "I suppose you think I'm pretty poor at it. Have—have you been asked very much?"

Miss Dean looked about her cautiously.

"Will you promise not to tell?" she whispered.

He nodded.

"Six times!"

"Counting me?"

"No. You're seven."

"Seven men," he murmured hopelessly, "Then I suppose—"

"Oh, no," she interrupted. "Not seven men at all. First there was one man who asked me once. Then there was another man who asked me five times. And then there's you."

"And you refused the first one?"

"Yes; I'm afraid I did."

"And the second one had no better luck?"

"Worse."

"Because he kept coming back so often, I suppose."

"Exactly," she said with a nod. "He was so persistent that he suffered more from the blow."

Tilley reflected gloomily.

"Then I expect," he said, "that there isn't any chance for me?"

"I want you to know that I feel very much honored," said Miss Dean in a kindly tone.

"If it's 'no,' tell me so!" he exclaimed.

She sighed gently.

"I shall not marry," she said.

Tilley wiped his forehead and shook his head.

"Not anybody?"

"I think not."

"Is—is there anybody else?" he asked anxiously.

Miss Dean shook her head slowly.

"Not Higgins?"

She could not forbear to laugh, but checked herself when she observed the lugubrious face of the naturalist.

"Not that I know of," she replied ambiguously. "Do you think I could get him if I wanted him?"

"You could get anybody," he affirmed, with sad emphasis.

"Beautifully said, Mr. Tilley. That's what I call a true compliment. But I don't think I want anybody."

He sat in silence for several minutes, while Miss Dean studied the last of the tinted clouds, now turned from pink to purple. He was not a happy naturalist,

and his mind was far, far away from the insect world.

"Well," he said at last, "I shall not give up yet."

Miss Dean was plainly surprised at this declaration of persistence and even somewhat alarmed.

"You're not going to ask me five times?" she exclaimed.

"Maybe more," he answered solemnly.

"Mercy! Oh, I wouldn't, if I were you, Mr. Tilley. Really, I wouldn't. Five times is much too often to ask any woman. One woman isn't worth it, you know. I really think you'd do better to distribute it around."

"I shall persist," he said stubbornly.

"I'm sorry," she said. "So shall I."

"Even if I ask ten times," he added desperately.

"I should hate to feel that you were just out to break the record, Mr. Tilley. It would be such a useless waste of time, you see. Wouldn't it be much more profitable if you devoted that time to your profession?"

He shook his head moodily.

"You see, I'm afraid you've been neglecting it," she added, watching him. "At first you were very enthusiastic, but now—And if I've been the cause of it I shall feel very guilty."

Tilley stirred restlessly.

"Nevertheless, I'm going to ask you some more," he declared.

"Oh, please! Not right now, anyhow."

"Oh, I'll give you time to reconsider," he conceded. "But—but I won't have Higgins—or that Grouch."

She laughed with genuine mirth.

"I promise not to marry the Grouch, if he asks me five hundred times," she said. "There! Does that help?"

"A little," he admitted as he rose awkwardly to his feet. "But it's a hard blow, Miss Dean, no matter if you try to soften it. You see"—he cracked another knuckle—"I'm honestly in love."

"I believe you, Mr. Tilley. Even if it sounds somewhat vain for me to say so. And in the mean time you go back to your insects. And I'll help you, if I may. I didn't believe I could ever tolerate them myself, but now I'm beginning to think I could actually love them.

"Wait! Don't say it. Don't tell me you would you were a bug. It's lovely of you to think it, but honestly I can't stand another compliment this evening."

He walked with her as far as the cottage, where he bade her a melancholy good night. She shook hands with the utmost cordiality and thanked him again for the honor he had offered and the beautiful way in which he had expressed it.

"I'll do it better next time," he promised. "I bungled it to-day. You wait and see."

Miss Dean sat on the porch for a long time, thinking gravely.

"I can't make sense of it," she mused. "It's more than merely absurd. It's mysterious. He may be a naturalist, but he's an extraordinary one. And I cannot make out whether he really wants me to marry him or not.

"I don't think he despaired quite as much as he ought to. But, of course, that may be only his peculiar way. He may be quite broken-hearted, after all. And yet—"

She shook her head.

CHAPTER XX.

FOR THE FAIR NAME OF MISS DEAN.

AT a point along the tired old road that ran from the village to the farm, just as darkness came, Miss Dean found herself in command of an odd expedition. She had walked nearly a mile to join it and was sitting on a stone wall, awaiting it, when the expedition arrived in a lugubrious automobile.

It consisted of the village photographer, his husky assistant Phil and an assortment of photographic apparatus.

The photographer alighted from his car and glanced wonderingly about.

"Well, ma'am," he said, "I don't see anything here to be photographed but a lot of old woods that ain't worth anything; but you're the doctor, and you're payin' for it, so all you've got to do is say what you want."

"Thank you," said Miss Dean. "Did you load that plateholder I left with you this morning?"

"Yes'm; the five by seven."

"And you have a flash-light?"

"Yes'm. Phil, he works that; he's a kind of an expert at it."

Miss Dean glanced appraisingly at the assistant.

"I'll need Phil for something else," she said. "I guess you can manage to work the flash yourself. Turn around, Phil, and let me see how you look from the back."

Phil obeyed mechanically. He was a stocky young man of medium height, and he bulked heavily in the gloom. Miss Dean studied him for several seconds and then nodded her head.

"I think you'll do very well," she said. "And now if you'll bring the camera and everything else I'll show you the very place."

She led the way through a break in the stone wall and into a patch of woods where the trees were mostly birches. The photographer and his assistant followed stumblingly in the gloom.

"Here's where I want you to put the camera," said Miss Dean, coming to a halt. "We're on an old path, if you're able to make it out. I'm going to stand over there, by that big birch. I'm to be in the picture, you see—and Phil, too."

"Who? Me?" exclaimed Phil.

"If you please," she answered. "Come, I'll show you."

Phil stood puzzling when Miss Dean took him by the hand and led him some fifteen feet further along the overgrown path.

"There," she said. "You're to stand just where I put you. No; don't turn around. Your back is going to be toward the camera."

"A picture of my back?" queried Phil.

"Also of mine. I shall stand right beside you—so. Keep your head exactly as it is. I shall turn mine sidewise—like this."

She arranged the group with the swiftness and certainty of a woman who knows exactly what she wants. Behind them the photographer, scarcely visible in the dark, was setting up his tripod and making ready his flash.

"And now, Phil," said Miss Dean, "put your arm around my waist."

"What!"

"Certainly."

Phil peered down into the face of the lady and backed off a yard. She laughed.

"Oh, it can't be as difficult as that," she exclaimed. "Come back here. It won't hurt you."

But Phil hesitated.

"Oh, come!" she commanded. "Are you afraid? Mr. Photographer, will you please tell Phil to put his arm around me?"

There was a chuckle from behind them.

"He's scared," said the voice of the photographer. "He's gettin' ready to marry Pete Trimble's girl, and she keeps a kind of a smart eye on him, ma'am."

"Well, Pete Trimble's girl isn't going to see the picture," said Miss Dean. "And beside, Phil's face isn't going to show; so there isn't anything for him to worry about. Come along, Phil."

But the photographer's assistant still hung back.

"I don't want any trouble," he muttered.

"You won't have any with me," said Miss Dean, reassuringly.

"I'm thinkin' of Susie, ma'am."

"Susie won't know it. Have you never hugged anybody but Susie?"

Phil coughed.

"You go along and help the lady," came an order from the darkness. "If she wants a romantic picture, I guess she can have whatever she pays for. It ain't my business and it ain't yours.

"Don't stand there gapin', Phil, as I expect you are, but do as the lady says. Make believe you're walkin' with Susie. If you ain't got gumption enough I'll do it myself."

"Thank you," called Miss Dean. "I'd be glad to have you; but you're not quite the figure for it."

"I ain't much on luck," remarked the photographer, gallantly. "Phil, if you don't hug that lady you're fired."

Phil sighed noisely and stepped slowly back to his place.

"Now, Phil," said the lady, as she seized his arm and drew it about her waist, "you hold me so. Keep it there, I tell you!

"What an absurd young man you are. If you can't do better than that I'd advise Susie Trimble to look elsewhere. Mr. Photographer, will you please tell Phil to do as I say?"

"You, Phil! You go on and hug that lady right!"

"Better," said Miss Dean, an instant later. "Just keep thinking of Susie. Do you think you can manage to keep your arm there if I let go of it?"

Phil drew a deep breath and summoned all the gallantry within him.

"You needn't hold it," he said, boldly. "I won't let go."

"See that you don't. Is everything ready for the picture?"

"Ready, ma'am," called the voice behind them.

Miss Dean turned her head so that her profile was presented to the camera and snuggled closely again Phil's stalwart shoulder.

"Go ahead, Mr. Photographer!"

There was a puff and a white flash, then the woods were dark again. Several seconds elapsed.

"Oh, Mr. Photographer," said a voice, "now you can tell Phil to let go."

"Phil, you unhug that lady—quick!"

"I was goin' to," grumbled Phil. "I was doin' it when she spoke."

Miss Dean was laughing softly.

"There's hope for you yet, Phil. It was nice of you not to be in a hurry," she assured him, as she groped her way back to where the camera stood. "Do you think the picture will be all right?"

"Oh, I got it, ma'am," said the photographer. "If you're comin' down to the village in the mornin' I'll show you the negative."

"But I don't want it developed," said Miss Dean, as she took the plateholder from his hands. "You've done everything I want you to do. I'll just take this with me the way it is."

The head of the studio leaned closer to stare at her.

"Really, this is all I want," she said. "I'm ever so much obliged to both of you. Phil did splendidly, after he started.

"Don't worry, Phil; Susie won't ever know a thing. And don't forget to let me know when the wedding takes place."

She made her way back to the road, hugging the plateholder under her arm, and heard the photographer and his assistant crashing after her.

"I'll walk back to the farm; I'm not a bit afraid," she said. "No; I don't want you to drive me. Please go back to the village."

"Just as you say, ma'am," said the photographer. "I don't know what it's all about, but just as you say."

"I — I don't mind seein' you home," mumbled Phil.

"Phil!" exclaimed the lady. "What about Susie?"

They heard her laughing softly as she set off along the road.

The farm was cloaked in its evening quiet when Miss Dean turned in from the road. As she neared the house she met Mame Brundage, walking aimlessly in the direction of the orchard.

"Where you been?" demanded Mame.

"Walking, Marigold."

"Wish I'd been with you. It gets terrible lonesome here nights. There ain't anybody around.

"Mr. March, he's gone to bed. And Mr. Higgins is up at the lake, and I don't know where Mr. Tilley is. He's been gone somewheres since supper. Mom and pop's down in the chicken house, tryin' to set some hens. It's an awful narrer kind of a life."

With a word of sympathy, Miss Dean passed on. Near the door of the farmhouse she waited until Mame had vanished from sight. Then she entered the building swiftly and groped her way toward the stairs that led to the upper floor.

A minute later she emerged into the open again and walked off in the direction of the cottage.

An hour later Augustus J. Tilley sat in his room staring at a flat object that he held in his hands. He was in a state of suppressed excitement. For here was the missing plateholder!

He had found it lying on his bed. How or why it came there were matters quite beyond the present bewildered state of his mind. He knew that it contained a plate;

the weight of it was sufficient evidence. But whether there was anything on that plate he did not yet know.

For some time he sat contemplating the plateholder, trying to build an explanation around it. Then, rousing himself, he made certain preparations.

A quilt was pinned over the window, in order to make darkness certain. A little iron lamp with a red bull's-eye smoked on a table in the corner. Trays and chemicals were produced from his grip.

The oil lamp that ordinarily furnished illumination was extinguished, and the gaunt figure of Tilley became dimly silhouetted against a red glow as a nervous finger slipped the catch of the plateholder.

Immediately after breakfast the following morning the naturalist walked solemnly out of the farmhouse and set off in the direction of the lake, his long strides carrying him at a rapid pace.

There was a grim look in his colorless eyes and, altogether, something uncommonly desperate in the set of his pale face. He carried a parcel.

It chanced that Higgins was in his shack, overhauling some tackle, when he heard himself summoned by a stern voice. He emerged to confront Tilley, who was standing just outside the doorway and glaring at him with an expression that might have alarmed a more timid man.

"What's up?" asked Higgins.

"You know!" said Tilley, menacingly.

"Hanged if I do."

The naturalist unwrapped his parcel and, from between two pieces of stiff cardboard, drew forth a damp photographic print. He held it up before the astonished eyes of Higgins.

The fisherman studied the picture with slowly growing amazement.

"Where 'd you get that?" he asked, as he stared at it.

"You know where I got it."

Higgins shook his head.

"Don't lie!" snarled Tilley. "You're in it, aren't you?"

The fisherman examined the chunky figure whose arm was tightly locked about the waist of Miss Dean. He was very much puzzled. He could not say whether he was in the picture or not.

"What's all the fuss, anyhow?" he demanded. "You act excited."

"I'm not excited. I'm cool!" cried the naturalist. "I'm cool and collected. There you are and you can't deny it!"

The picture shook in his trembling hand.

Higgins had certain rudiments of gallantry. It occurred to him that it was not the part of a gentleman to deny anything; in fact, it seemed that to enter a disclaimer would be to reflect upon the charms of Miss Dean, who had won something more than his intense admiration.

He rather wished that the picture represented all that it seemed; all that he resented was its possession in the hands of Tilley and the extraordinary attitude of that gentleman.

"I haven't denied anything," said Higgins, belligerently.

"I know it! You can't!"

"I don't have to deny anything—not to you. Where do you come in to make a row, anyhow?"

"Never you mind," said Tilley darkly. "Only after this you keep away from her."

"What—what for?"

"Because I won't have it. Understand?"

Higgins was very red in the face, but he laughed.

"I don't know where or how you got the picture," he said, "but there's something cheap and sneaky about it, and after this you can mind your own business or take what's coming to you.

"I don't like you, Tilley. You're funny to look at, but I don't like you. So you can run right along and hunt your bugs, or you can go to the devil, or you can do both."

Tilley breathed heavily, but stood his ground.

"I—I want to know what you were saying to her," he said, solemnly, ignoring the insult.

"Ha!" said Higgins. He was beginning to enjoy it.

"I demand to know!"

"Ha, ha!"

"Did you ask—"

"Certainly."

"Did she—"

"She did," declared Higgins, without an instant's hesitation.

Tilley gasped and fell back a pace.

"I don't believe it," he groaned.

"That's nothing to me. I'll do the believing."

The naturalist, even paler than common, stood irresolute for several seconds. Then he jammed the photograph recklessly into his pocket.

"I'll find out soon enough," he said. "I'm going to ask her!"

He turned and walked rapidly away from the shack. Higgins stood grinning at him for a few seconds.

Then the grin faded abruptly. A startled look came into his eyes. Tilley would ask her, beyond doubt, and then—

He started after the naturalist on a run and overtook him. The path was not wide enough for two and Higgins rudely jostled Tilley aside and took the lead.

He was moving at a dog trot. When Tilley recovered his balance he set out in grim pursuit. Higgins ran faster and the naturalist increased his stride. For a while Tilley managed to maintain his position, owing to the superior length of his legs.

And then the fisherman began to draw steadily away, for his lungs were better than those of his rival and they presently triumphed over mere legs.

Higgins, still running, burst upon the surprised vision of Miss Dean as she was standing at the edge of the creek, tossing sticks into it and watching them go swirling down the tiny rapids. He did not slacken his pace until he arrived in front of her, on the opposite side of the creek.

"Has anything happened? she asked.

Higgins, breathing heavily, made a herculean attempt to control his lungs and managed a short sentence.

"You've got to marry me!" he shouted.

She studied him with an air of surprise.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because—I told Tilley—you were going to!"

Miss Dean threw the last stick into the water and watched it race down-stream.

"Isn't that a peculiar reason, Mr. Higgins?" she asked.

"You *must* marry me!" he cried, earnestly.

His attitude was one of such desperation that Miss Dean thought it fortunate that the creek lay between them.

"Must?" she repeated. "Just because you told somebody that I would?"

Higgins shook his head in despair.

"You don't understand," he blurted. "Honestly, you don't. And there's hardly any time to explain."

He looked fearfully behind him.

"I can't say it the way I want to. There isn't time; I've got to make it short. I love you!

"I'm honest. I've got a good business. I'll take good care of you. I'm healthy; never sick a day. And—and don't you see, you've *got* to marry me!"

"I'm afraid I don't see," answered Miss Dean. "And—be careful. You'll fall into the creek."

Higgins, perched perilously near the brink, ignored the warning.

"I—I haven't got time to go round by the bridge and do it right," he said. "He'll be here any minute."

"Mr. Tilley?"

"Yes. And, you see, I told him—and you've got to help me make good."

Miss Dean smiled in a kindly way, but was not ready to commit herself.

"But why did you tell him such a thing?" she asked, curiously.

Higgins glanced back across the meadow.

"There he is now!" he exclaimed. "Please—please don't throw me down!"

Miss Dean also looked across the meadow.

"He's stopped," she said. "He's talking to somebody. It looks like Mr. March."

The fisherman whirled about and confirmed her observation.

"Yes, and he's showing it to him!" he declared, in an agonized voice.

Indeed, Tilley appeared to be showing something to the Grouch, and while the latter bent closer to study it the naturalist pointed with his long arm in the direction of the pair who stood on either side of the creek.

"What is it he is showing?" inquired Miss Dean.

"A picture. I don't know how he got it. But it shows you and me. I've got my arm around you and—" He hesitated, but only for an instant. "And your head is on my shoulder!"

"How extraordinary, Mr. Higgins!"

"I know. But that's what started me off telling him. I'm sorry now, but you see how it was. I couldn't throw you down.

"Of course, it never happened—what the picture shows. But I wish to God it had!"

Miss Dean began to nod understandingly.

"I see," she said. "You were trying to give the picture a proper explanation."

"That's it," said Higgins, gratefully. "Only I love you, too."

"That's awfully good of you, Mr. Higgins. And it was very kind and thoughtful of you to try to explain the picture. But—"

She shook her head.

"Don't say it!" he pleaded.

"I'm afraid I must."

"It 'll leave me in an awful hole," he groaned. "And he'll come down here—"

"I don't think so," said Miss Dean, interrupting. "He seems to be going away. Mr. March, too."

Higgins looked behind him again and saw that it was true.

"I don't see why," she added, with a slight frown, "he should have shown the picture to Mr. March."

"It's because he's sore," declared Higgins. "I'll lick him for that."

"No; you mustn't do that. It would be very embarrassing to me, so I ask you not to."

The fisherman looked across at her, disconsolate and worried.

"Well, what am I going to do?" he asked. "He'll be asking you, sooner or later, and if you tell him you're not going to marry me I'll never hear the end of it. Honestly, don't you think you'd better marry me?"

"Lots of us never do what is best for us," answered Miss Dean, with a sigh. "We are perverse. Suppose I simply refuse to answer any questions on that subject, in case he should mention it? Would that do?"

"Will you do that much?" he said, eagerly.

"I'll decline to be cross-examined," she said, firmly.

Higgins sighed.

"Well, that's something," he remarked, gratefully. "But just remember, Miss Dean, I want you to marry me, anyhow."

"I won't forget," she nodded.

Higgins felt that somehow he had reached an anticlimax, and he did not wish the interview to end thus. He wanted to leave her with a death-defying sentiment ringing in her ears.

"And—and I'd wade through hell and high water to get you!" he bawled, as she turned away.

"That's dear of you," she answered.

But she could not help wondering why he did not begin by wading the creek.

CHAPTER XXI.

TWO NURSES.

THE Grouch was sick. He had taken to his bed in the middle of the afternoon, but his plight was known to nobody until Mame went to the cabin with his supper.

She found him squirming from side to side, gripping his head in his hands and groaning anon. Mame was shocked and alarmed.

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed. "You're sick, ain't you?"

He glared at her with an extremely bright pair of eyes.

"You got a headache, Mr. March?"

He rolled over until he faced the wall and made no answer.

"Are you sufferin' much pain?" she asked.

"Go away," he answered, in a muffled voice.

"An' leave you here all alone?" Mame's voice was indignant.

"Get out!"

She shook her head firmly, but he could not see that. Great pity filled Mame's sensitive heart. To see this noble being lying stricken on his couch seemed the most cruel of tragedies.

"I'll bathe your head," she declared, venturing to touch his forehead with her palm. "My, ain't it hot!"

He shrank from the touch and groaned again.

"Leave me alone," said the Grouch, weakly.

"Where — where's the pain?" asked Mame, and then held her breath at her own boldness.

"I'm—I'm poisoned!"

She uttered a faint shriek and sat in a chair.

"Poisoned!" she echoed. "It's the kidnapers! They've been tryin' to kill you. Oh, merciful Heaven! They've been tryin' to kill the one who—"

Mame checked herself at the brink of confession, but did not neglect to twist her hands in an agony of despair.

"Shut up!" said the Grouch. "Don't be an ass. Leave me alone."

"And you poisoned? I guess not. I'm goin' to stay right here and take care of you."

There was a truly frightful groan from the bed.

"Pop knew a man who was poisoned once. He suffered something horrible. It was a very lingerin' death, it seems. He took the poison in purpose; he wasn't happy on account of something his wife done.

"After he took it they sent for the doctor, but it was too late to do anything much. Everybody said it was such a sad case. Those things make an awful impression on one. Don't you think so? I do."

The Grouch sat up in bed and raised his fists to the ceiling.

"For the love of Heaven, get out!" he yelled.

Mame shook her head with emphasis.

"I'll have mom make you some boneset tea," she said. "And after that I'll get pop to drive down to the village for the doctor."

"Don't want the tea! Don't want the doctor! If you bring a doctor here I'll shoot him!"

Mame sighed, shook her head and remained silent for several minutes, during which the Grouch lay still and gritted his teeth. His head was aching horribly.

"Maybe you could eat a little toast," she suggested.

"Good Heaven! Are you here yet?"

He turned and looked at her with a terrifying scowl.

"I take natural to nursin'," said Mame. "I've got a sympathetic nature. Let me get you a drink of water."

"No!"

"Maybe I'd better heat a brick for your feet. They say heat draws the poison."

"Oh, go away and die!" he moaned.

But he could not offend her now, for Mame knew that he did not mean this harshness; it was simply the sickness that racked him. She did not go away, but sat near him, watching with anxious eyes and groaning sympathetically when he groaned.

Once she tried bathing his head, but he pushed her away violently. Once she brought him a glass of water; he drank half of it and flung the remainder on the floor. That was the only one of her ministrations that he would accept.

It was dusk and there had been a long silence in the cabin, when Mame ventured once more to ask him how he felt.

"Worse!"

"It's the poison takin' deeper effect," she whispered to herself, with a shudder. Then aloud: "I'm goin' to get you somethin'. I'll be back soon."

"Stay away!" he yelled, with sudden vigor, as she passed out of the cabin.

But Mame had not the slightest intention of staying away. She was frightened and she was going for help; she did not know just where, but she felt that it was a time for consultation.

The first person she met was Tilley, and to him, in hurried sentences, she poured out the tale of the Grouch's peril.

"What 'll I give him, Mr. Tilley?"

"Give him poison," advised the naturalist, who was not deeply impressed with Mame's narrative.

She uttered a cry of horror.

"Why, that's what's the matter with him!" she exclaimed. "Oh, how can you be so heartless?"

Rushing away from the author of this sinister advice, Mame suddenly recalled that Higgins usually brought with him to

the farm a small medicinal kit. She set off to the lake at a breathless pace, praying that she might find the fisherman at his post.

Her prayer was answered. Higgins was sitting in front of his shack, staring moodily at the lake.

"Mr. March is terrible sick," she gasped. "Can't you gimme something for him?"

"What's the matter with him?" asked Higgins, indifferently.

"He's poisoned."

"He's entitled to be."

"Oh, Mr. Higgins! What a thing for you to say! Can't you give me some medicine for him?"

"Sure. You'll find a lot of bottles on the shelf inside. Help yourself."

"I—I don't know which to take."

"Take any of 'em. Take 'em all. They're all good."

The callousness of the usually good-natured fisherman shocked her. Nevertheless, she ran into the shack, gathered up all the bottles she could find, wrapped them in her apron and started back for the cabin.

It was dark when she reached there and Mame's first act was to light the lamp. From the bed there was an angry exclamation as the light flashed into the Grouch's eyes.

"You back?" he demanded.

"I've brought a lot of medicine for you," said Mame, reassuringly.

"Won't take a drop."

"You feelin' better?" she asked, approaching the bed.

"I'm dying," declared the Grouch, hotly. "Get away from me."

She sighed and went back to the table, where she began examining Higgins's miniature pharmacy. There was one large bottle containing a dark liquid. The label said: "A tablespoonful at bedtime." Mame drew the cork and sniffed.

"I've got something here that smells real good," she said. "I'll give you some."

"No!"

"Then maybe you'd sooner have some pills. There's some white ones here, about the size the doctor give me when I was down to Hurleyville, and in my case they were very beneficial."

"Leave me alone. Go away. Shut up!" was the answer she received.

Mame shook her head with patient resignation and compromised by bringing him a glass of water. He accepted that, drank it at a gulp and asked for more.

For the Grouch, along with his devouring headache, had a fever of high degree and his throat was parched and burning. After the second glass of water, he subsided limply on the pillow and lay still for such a long time that Mame's alarm returned.

"How are you feelin' now?" she asked, approaching the bed.

He merely groaned.

"Is the pain better?"

Another groan.

She walked back to the chair and sat down to watch. After a while he became restless again, grinding his teeth as the pain stabbed at his temples and now and then making noises that were fearsome.

At last she could endure the strain no longer. She rushed from the cabin and set off at a run in the direction of the cottage, thoughtless of kidnapers and utterly reckless of her own safety.

Perhaps Miss Dean could help; she knew so many things, Mame reflected—particularly about men.

Miss Dean was about to go to undress for bed when Mame burst into the cottage and hastily told the adverse news.

"He's been poisoned and I think he's dyin'," she said, in conclusion.

Miss Dean gave a start of surprise, but did not lose her poise.

"What sort of symptoms has he?" she asked.

Mame was too bewildered to recollect and Miss Dean was compelled to cross-examine. Having asked all the questions that seemed necessary, she nodded, went into the bedroom, slipped a few articles hastily into the pockets of her sweater and returned to Mame.

"All right; we'll start," she said.

Mame looked surprised, and hesitated. She had not bargained for this; she was not at all sure that it was necessary.

"If you could just give me somethin'," she began, "I think maybe—"

"I'd better see him," interrupted Miss Dean. "Come on."

After that there was nothing for Mame to do but follow. She was under the domination of a superior will, although she was probably not aware of it.

Miss Dean led the way at a smart walk, taking a short cut that involved the climbing of a rail fence. She scaled the fence with such dexterity that Mame received a new and distinctly unfavorable impression of her, which she stored away for future consideration, when the perils of the Grouch were either ended in recovery or death.

Miss Dean walked into the cabin without ceremony and went directly to the bed, where she bent over and made a critical examination of the Grouch. His face was averted from her, but when he became aware of a close presence he turned and looked up.

Their glances met steadily for several seconds. At first there seemed to be clear recognition, then came a blank look.

"Hello, Mame," he said.

Miss Dean straightened up and knitted her forehead. She reached for his wrist and pressed a firm finger on his pulse. The Grouch rolled his eyes and began to laugh.

"I'm going fishing to-morrow, Mame," he said, "and I want you to tell Knock to get me a million frogs. No; a million and a half. I'm going to catch all the fish in the world."

He continued to look steadily at Miss Dean, who lost count of his pulse, which was really very rapid. Presently she dropped his wrist, walked across the cabin, and beckoned to Mame.

"You didn't tell me he was delirious," she said. "How long has he been out of his head?"

"This—this is the first I noticed it," answered Mame, in a trembling voice. "He thinks you're me, don't he? Does that mean he's very bad?"

"Not necessarily. Go down to the house and get me some ice. Bring a good-sized piece and something to crack it with."

Mame hesitated. For one thing, it was getting late, and it was a dark journey to the farmhouse. For another, Miss Dean would be left alone with the Grouch.

"Do as I say—at once," said Miss Dean, sharply.

Surprised at her own submission, Mame set out on her errand.

The Grouch had rolled over so that he faced the wall again. He was scowling and muttering softly.

"Lord!" he whispered. "*She's* here! I'll strangle that idiot for bringing her."

Miss Dean uncorked a small bottle of tablets she had brought with her from the cottage, poured a glass of water and walked over to the bed. The Grouch heard her coming.

"Don't you come near me, Mame Brundage!" he called sharply. "You can't poison me."

"It is not Mame. It is I."

He sat up, stared and laughed boisterously. Miss Dean bit her lip and controlled a slight shudder.

"Get away from me!" he warned, with an ugly grin.

"I have something for your fever," she said quietly, showing him some tablets that lay in her palm. "They will make you feel better. Take them."

The Grouch squinted at the tablets and shook his head knowingly.

"You're trying to poison me," he repeated, snickering. "But I'm too smart for you. I'll call the police if you don't keep away."

Miss Dean was perplexed, but persistent.

"You need only take three," she said. "You don't think Mame would poison you, do you?"

He jerked his glance upward and glared.

"Yes, you would!" he cried. "You're all trying to kill me. There's Tilley; he's trying. But I'll fool him.

"All he does is to go and send telegrams to the city about the woman down in the cottage. Ha, ha!"

Miss Dean started and nearly dropped the tablets.

"What's that?" she asked.

He leered at her and shook his head in a silly fashion.

"Won't tell you any more, Mame. You'd go and tell her. She's a bad one, Mame. You better keep away from her.

"She had her picture taken with the

fisherman. Beautiful picture! All full of love, Mame. Tilley's got it; he's going to send it to the city. He'll fix her!"

Miss Dean turned and walked over to the table. She was very much disturbed over something. It was not the photograph; she knew about that.

But the telegrams? What were they? She wondered if delirious people ever told the truth.

As she stood with her back to him the Grouch twisted his head cautiously and looked at her. He smiled grimly. And then a genuine spasm of pain seized him and he groaned as he dropped back on the pillow. The groan aroused Miss Dean to her sense of duty and she went back to the bed.

"Come! This is your medicine," she said. "I threw the poison ones away. These are new ones."

He shook his head and laughed again.

With sudden resolution, she slipped her arm under his shoulders and raised him.

"You've simply got to take them," she commanded. "And I won't go away until I'm ready. I'm not afraid of you. Here!"

She forced the tablets between his lips and the Grouch found himself swallowing, although he made a faint effort at rebellion.

"Be quiet," she ordered. "You're spilling the water. Now take a drink."

He gulped the contents of the glass.

"Now I'm poisoned," he said. "Hope you're satisfied, Mame. Great joke, isn't it?"

Miss Dean lowered him back to the pillow. As she did so Mame Brundage entered the cabin, carrying a piece of ice in a towel. The Grouch spied her and began to giggle.

"You're twins, aren't you?" he cried. "Two Mames! It isn't enough to have one poison you; it's got to be two. One of you got me, but the other one won't."

Mame dropped the ice on the floor and put her hands to her breast.

"What does he mean?" she whispered, in an awed tone.

"I just gave him some medicine," said Miss Dean. "He'll be better after a while. His mind isn't clear."

She stooped and picked up the ice.

"Two Mames! Two Mames!" the Grouch was repeating. "I chased one of them and she came back double. Hard luck!"

While Mame stood shivering, Miss Dean took a hammer and began splintering the ice.

"Get a towel," she said.

Mame roused herself and obeyed, and Miss Dean, after folding the towel to suit her, began deftly filling it with pieces of ice. Then she walked over to the bed.

"Get away!" cried the Grouch. "Get away, Mame. And you, Mame, over there, come and take yourself away."

Miss Dean paid no attention to his babbling, but laid the ice-packed towel across his forehead. For an instant he resisted; then, as the moist chill struck through, he suddenly became quiet.

The ice conquered the Grouch. His head was aching frightfully and the coolness was grateful. After that Miss Dean was in command.

In an hour she gave him three more tablets, felt his pulse again, and nodded significantly. Meantime, she kept Mame at the task of cracking ice, and even sent her back to the farmhouse for more.

Occasionally the Grouch talked foolishness, and once more he said something about Tilley and his telegrams; that was when Mame was making her second trip to the house. Miss Dean bent close to listen, but, much to her dissatisfaction, she could make nothing coherent out of it.

Midnight came and the Grouch was actually sleeping. Miss Dean listened to his breathing, laid her hand on his forehead, and tried his pulse for the third time. Then she looked at her watch.

"Is he better?" Mame whispered.

"Yes. He'll probably sleep for some time. I'm going back to the cottage. You'll have to stay with him."

Mame nodded.

"In two hours, if he's awake," said Miss Dean, "give him two of those tablets. If he's asleep, don't disturb him. Keep fresh ice on his head. That's about all, I think.

"If he should happen to get worse, which isn't likely, come down to the cottage and call me."

"I will," promised Mame. "Do—do

they often get like the way he was? What do you call it?"

"Delirious! Oh, it's quite common. You needn't be afraid of him."

"I ain't," lied Mame. "I'll take care of him. Ain't it queer, Miss Dean? He don't know you've been here at all."

"It's probably better," said Miss Dean.

And yet she was conscious of a vague feeling of dissatisfaction as she said it. She wanted no credit for anything, so far as the Grouch was concerned; nevertheless, she had certain strongly marked feminine traits, and a dislike for being wholly ignored was one of them.

"But he knew *I* was here," remarked Mame, and a tone of superiority crept into her voice. "I expect that's because he's come to be sort of dependent on me for everything."

"Probably," said Miss Dean, curtly. "Don't forget about the ice—and the tablets, if he should wake. Good night."

As she walked back to her cottage she reflected upon virtue being its own reward, but derived singularly little satisfaction from her thoughts.

CHAPTER XXII.

"BALANCE—ONE PAIR SLIPPERS."

MISS DEAN was awake early in the morning, but she did not arise at once. She lay quietly, looking up at the whitewashed ceiling and reviewing the events of the night.

She was not worrying in the least about the case of the Grouch, for she had not left the cabin until she was certain that the peak load of his troubles had been passed. Beside, Mame had not come to call her during the night, which was additional assurance that things were probably going well.

But she was not yet complacent over the Grouch's delirium. Although, as before, she rejected the action that she had done anything more than mere duty, and while she asked no gratitude or praise, it seemed unsatisfactory to reflect that her services were wholly unknown to him, even though she did not wish to have them acknowledged. Next to the delirium itself, Miss Dean considered, with unsatisfying results, some of the matters were incidental to it.

It was decidedly mystifying to learn that Tilley had been sending telegrams to the city concerning herself—that is, if the Grouch was really babbling facts, rather than bits of imagination. She had no idea to whom the naturalist could be telegraphing, or why, or what he said, and she wondered if it were true that he intended to send a copy of the photograph to the city.

"I'm afraid," she murmured, "that I've been pushing things a bit too far. I'm altogether too fond of creating situations. I'd better reform for a while. Perhaps I'd better go away. I'll see."

When she had come to the end of her reflections and found herself beginning again, she arose quickly, walked over to her bedroom window and breathed deeply of the fresh morning air. It was hardly past sunrise, but all desire for sleep had vanished.

She walked over to the closet, took out a long coat, slipped it on and then slid her bare feet into a pair of shoes. Catching up a rough towel, she left the cottage and followed the bank of the creek for about a hundred yards, to a point where the lively little stream was arched and shaded by willows. The place was one of placid seclusion, particularly at that time in the morning.

Pushing her way through some bushes, she came to a spot where the creek widened and deepened and slackened its tumultuous pace almost to a halt. A shelving bank sloped down to a quiet pool.

Miss Dean slipped off her coat—and everything else. She blew a kiss to a chipmunk who sat up and watched unabashed, and then slipped down into the pool, laughing as the cool water enveloped her. For five minutes she had a wonderful time, swimming and splashing and trying to keep her hair dry.

Then she scrambled ashore, seized the towel and attacked herself so vigorously that in a short time she was a very pink lady. All this put her in a mood for whistling as she walked back to the cottage, enveloped in her long coat, with a blue-and-white nightie thrown carelessly over her shoulder.

Every day at the Brundage farm began this way; it always put her in fine humor to know that of all the guests she was the only one who enjoyed the privilege of a private bath.

After dressing, she decided to go for a walk; there was a considerable interval before breakfast would be ready. She searched for her light sweater and could not find it, which puzzled her for a moment, because she always kept it thrown across the back of a particular chair.

And then, with an exclamation, she remembered—the sweater was in the Grouch's cabin. She had worn it last night and left it there.

"How careless and how provoking!" she said aloud.

It was not the absence of the sweater that annoyed her. She did not really need it for comfort; if she did, there was an extra one. It was the fact that the sweater was on the premises of the Grouch, where he could not fail to find it as soon as he stirred about.

She recalled exactly where she left it, hanging on a peg in the door. Of course, she realized that the sweater might accomplish what the delirium of the Grouch seemed to forbid; it would greet his eyes as a symbol that there had been another in the cabin beside Mame Brundage. But Miss Dean did not care to have things in that wise.

"He would misinterpret it," she said, shaking her head. "It would never do. He would think I had left it deliberately; he's that kind of a man.

"He'd think it was a bid for gratitude, or an invitation to pursuit, or perhaps the beginning of a pursuit itself—no matter which he thought, it would be humiliating. I must get it away from there—quickly."

She glanced at her watch.

"He'll hardly be awake," she observed. "Particularly if Mame gave him two more tablets. Probably I'll find her there, anyhow. I'll go up to the cabin."

She set out with a briskness that was characteristic of her when she had a mission to perform, and which contrasted so strangely with her languid hours, when she seemed to have no purpose in life save indolence.

It may be charged that Miss Dean was difficult to please, and perhaps with a measure of truth. At first she was annoyed because the Grouch would probably remain in ignorance of her night vigil; now she was alarmed for fear that he might discover it.

But it must be remembered that, whatever else she was, she was first and foremost a woman.

She was drawing near to the cabin when she saw the door open and out stepped Mame Brundage, moving with gentle caution. Carefully closing the door behind her, Mame advanced, with a warning finger held against her lips.

Miss Dean halted and waited. As Mame neared her, she gave a sigh of satisfaction.

"I see you've got my sweater," she said. "Thank you. It's just what I was coming to get."

Mame handed over the sweater and glanced at Miss Dean with cold eyes.

"Yes. I thought you'd be after it," she said significantly.

"I forgot it last night."

"So it seems. Kind of funny you forgot it, isn't it? Didn't you feel cold goin' home?"

"I never thought anything about it until ten minutes ago," said Miss Dean, with a smile, as she slipped the sweater on. "What makes you look so queer—Marigold?"

Mame straightened herself haughtily.

"I ain't aware I look queer," she said. "And I don't do queer things, either. Anyways, I don't go leavin' my garments around in gentlemen's rooms, so I'll have to come back and get 'em."

Miss Dean laughed.

"No, ma'am; I never did that in all my life. You needn't have worried about the sweater; I was goin' to bring it to you.

"And if you feel so cold this mornin', seems to me there's another one down at the cottage. Seems to me I remember it."

"My dear Marigold," said Miss Dean, still laughing, "you have the intuition of a witch. I'm becoming afraid of you."

"I don't know what you mean," said Mame, stiffly. "And if you keep laughin' so loud you'll wake him up."

"Asleep, is he?"

" Cert'nly he is."

" Did he wake at all during the night?"

" No; he didn't. He kept right on sleepin' because he was havin' good care."

" He's fortunate," said Miss Dean, nodding. " Did he talk in his sleep?"

Mame shook her head, and it was a truthful answer, to the best of her knowledge and belief; for she had been asleep most of the night herself, sprawled in the Grouch's rocker.

" Any fever this morning?"

" He's very comfortable, thank you," answered Mame, primly. " I put my hand on his brow a little while ago and it's perfectly cool. You needn't be worryin' about anything, Miss Dean; I've got him in hand."

" He's a very lucky Grouch."

There was a flare in Mame's eyes.

" It's sinful, the way you all call him that!" she exclaimed. " And him a poor, sick man, who'd like to have perished if I hadn't taken care of him! It ain't right and fair.

" He's got a perfectly beautiful nature, when one understands him; but one can't understand unless one is sympathetic. The way you and Mr. Higgins and Mr. Tilley talk—"

" Sh!" whispered Miss Dean. " You'll wake him, Marigold."

Mame halted in the middle of her denunciation and looked anxiously toward the cabin.

" Let him sleep his head off," advised Miss Dean, as she turned to go. " Don't wake him. If he gets restless, use the hammer."

Mame Brundage stood petrified with horror as the lady of the cottage chuckled softly and started down the hill. Miss Dean had gone a considerable distance before she rallied herself and went back to the cabin.

She entered on tiptoe and closed the door, to find the Grouch wide awake and watching her with eyes that seemed to be sane.

" My! You've waked up, haven't you?"

" Anything odd about that?" he demanded.

" Feelin' better?" she asked, approaching the bed.

An ungracious grunt was the only reply. His glance began to rove about the cabin.

" I been watchin' you all night long," said Mame, tenderly. " You were terrible bad part of the time. But I've been doin' my best. You look lots better."

" Anybody else been here?" he asked suddenly.

Mame hesitated. She had no intention of sharing the glory of bringing Grouch back from the land of shadows, but she was not quite sure that she could avoid it.

It all depended upon whether people in delirium ever remembered what really happened. So she was cautious and evaded a direct answer.

" Don't you remember anything about last night?" she inquired.

He shook his head as he watched her narrowly.

" You were out of your head, Mr. March."

" I was, eh? Well, perhaps I was. I don't remember."

Mame felt the buoyancy of sudden relief.

" Yes; you were very delirious," she added. " You kept talkin' about things, but you didn't know what you were sayin'."

" Was I violent?"

" Oh, no; not violent. Not so as I couldn't handle you. There was a couple of times I had to hold you down, but that wasn't anything. I didn't mind."

" Managed it all alone, did you?"

" Why, cert'nly," said Mame, confident now. " You didn't think I was goin' to let anybody else take care of you, did you?"

" Get me a glass of water," said the Grouch.

As Mame obeyed the order, he turned his face away and screwed his lips into a sneer.

" The liar!" he muttered.

When she returned with the water he snatched the glass from her hand and drank greedily.

" That's all," he said. " You can go."

Mame refused to quail under the blow.

" Oh, I don't mind losin' a whole night's sleep," she said. " Besides, I got to tidy up the place and then get your breakfast."

" Don't want any breakfast. And you can leave the place as it is."

" You've got to eat somethin', just to

keep body and soul together, Mr. March. You've got to get your stren'th back."

"I'm going to get up," declared the Grouch. "Beat it!"

"Goodness me! Why, you can't get up yet," she exclaimed, in sudden dismay at the prospect of losing a patient.

"Can't, eh?" he growled. "All right, if you don't want to go, stay."

He threw aside the covers, sat up and swung his feet to the floor. Mame gasped and turned away at the vision of a gentleman in pajamas, even though they were made of silk.

"I got some work to do at the house," she said hastily.

As she passed out the door, the Grouch grinned almost pleasantly. He sat for a moment on the edge of the bed, and then tried standing up. Instantly he sat down again, because of a sudden blurring of vision and lightness of head.

The pain and fever had vanished, but he felt himself foolishly weak. After a second attempt, he lay down again.

"Never had a head as bad as that before," he muttered. "Believe I was poisoned, after all. Last time I'll ever eat any fish out of that lake.

"Wouldn't be surprised if Higgins slipped me a bad one. He's equal to it; he's got a grudge against me, Lord knows why."

He lay for a while, passing in review the events of the night before, just as Miss Dean had done earlier in the day.

"That Brundage idiot can certainly lie," he mused. "Nobody else was here, eh? I must have pulled a pretty good delirium. Only decent thing to do.

"Otherwise, I'd have to be telling her I was much obliged, and she doesn't want any of that, any more than I do. Saves explanations and a lot of damned foolishness.

"I'll bet I've got her guessing about those telegrams—and the picture. How about that picture, anyhow?"

He spent some time considering the flashlight that had been exhibited by Tilley, without finding any apparent comfort in his thoughts.

"He's a cheap cad to go around showing it!" exclaimed the Grouch, aloud. "What in blazes is he up to, anyhow?"

Presently he fell asleep again, only to awake and discover that Mame had returned in the mean time, for the cabin had been set in order. She had not remained, however, and he was grateful for that.

The Grouch found himself stronger now, so that he was able to rise and dress and shave himself, with only an occasional attack of dizziness. He was sitting in the open doorway, from which he could view nearly all of the Brundage farm, when Knock made his appearance.

"I've been waiting for you," said the Grouch. "I want you to do an errand. Don't go away."

He went over to the table, which served him as a writing-desk, pulled out a drawer, found an envelope and wrote an address on it. Then he wrote something else on a slip of paper, enclosed it in the envelope and sealed the letter with care.

"Take this down to the cottage and give it to Miss Dean," he said.

Knock took the envelope and studied it.

"You writin' letters to Miss Dean?" he asked, with a grin.

"None of your business. Shut up. Take it to her yourself; don't give it to anybody else. Understand?"

Knock nodded and went off on his errand. Crossing the meadow, he met Mame returning from the cottage. He permitted her to see that he carried an envelope in his hand, but kept sufficiently distant to avoid the risk of her snatching it.

"What you got there and where you goin'?" she demanded suspiciously.

"I got a letter for Miss Dean," he answered, with a superior grin. "Ha! Wouldn't y' like to see?"

With that he made off at a run, flinging back a jeer as Mame begged him to stop.

Miss Dean was down at the bridge, where she stood talking to Higgins and Tilley. There was something fairly uncanny in the way she managed to avert hostilities between those two gentlemen, when she had them both in hand at once; she even brought them to a semblance of amity, though it was merely temporary and was lacking in cordiality.

There was some tacit understanding between them that the lady of the cottage should be entitled to the privilege of an armistice.

She took the envelope from Knock, glanced at the address and opened it. Naturalist and fisherman watched as she drew forth a slip of paper, and each thought that he detected a curious expression in her eyes.

The envelope contained nothing but a check, drawn to the order of "Cash" and authorizing the payment of one hundred dollars. Miss Dean slipped it back in the envelope, excused herself for a moment and bid the courier to wait.

When she returned from the cottage she handed another envelope to Knock.

"Take it to Mr. March, please," she said.

Both gentlemen were regarding her with alarm as Knock trotted off. She smiled at them reassuringly.

"Mr. March sent a check to pay his bet," she explained.

They gasped simultaneously. Higgins rallied first.

"Good thing you sent it back to him," he declared. "He's not the kind of a person to have anything to do with."

"Probably worthless, anyhow," said Tilley, taking his cue.

"I prefer cash myself," admitted Miss Dean. "Well, what are we going to do? Chase butterflies or catch fish?"

"Butterflies!" cried Tilley.

"Fish!" said Higgins hastily.

"Let's do both," she said. "Come! We have a whole afternoon."

When the Grouch received the return message he snatched it from the courier's hand, demanding:

"What did she say?"

"Nothin'," replied Knock. "She was busy talkin' to Mr. Higgins an' Mr. Tilley."

The Grouch scowled blackly and opened the envelope. What he found was a sheet of note-paper with this:

Received on account, $100.00. Balance due, one pair slippers. LOUISE DEAN.

He stared at it for a few seconds, then thrust it into his pocket. When Knock was out of sight his face relaxed into a grin.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MISS DEAN IS ASHAMED OF HERSELF.

HIGGINS went in the evening to the cottage and, through a sense that is peculiar of women, Miss Dean instantly knew why. So she tried to talk about fishing, and when that failed, about other things in which Higgins ought to have been interested.

But it was all fruitless, for he would not be denied.

"It isn't any use trying to steer me off," he said, shaking his head gravely, "as you've been trying to do. I've just got to speak about it."

"I suppose so," she sighed.

"I don't want you to think I'm unreasonable; and I wouldn't annoy you for the whole world. But I made a fool of myself that morning and I've got to set it right."

She was tempted to accuse him in mock reproach, but checked her lips, although he caught the expression on them.

"Oh, please don't get me wrong again!" he exclaimed, flushing. "I don't mean I made a fool of myself because I asked you to marry me. No! It was the *way* I did it.

"It was all wrong—wrong, Miss Dean. I want to apologize for it."

"Please don't. It doesn't call for apology—far from it."

"Yes, it does," he declared stubbornly. "I daresay I wrecked every chance I had, right there. It wasn't any way to do things at all."

"Well," she admitted, slowly, "it was unusual. But, then, it was original, too."

"Don't laugh," pleaded the fisherman. "I don't believe you understand how serious I am."

"I'm not laughing; really. I wouldn't think of it. And I do believe you're serious, Mr. Higgins. Whatever you are, I'll always believe you're sincere."

He looked at her gratefully.

"Then you'll believe this," he said gravely. "I love you."

Miss Dean looked faintly troubled.

"Yes; very much," he added, staring at the floor between his solidly planted feet. "I was too much excited to explain things that morning. I didn't take time to say that I fell in love with you up at the lake—the first day you went out fishing with me.

"But I did, for a fact, Miss Dean. I think you're the finest woman I ever met."

She raised a protesting hand.

"I'm not," she said. "I know I'm not."

"I'm the judge, Miss Dean—and you *are*. I've been thinking it all over and there isn't any question about it. You're the one woman. And I'm asking you if you will marry me, just for that reason."

Miss Dean's face was grave and her eyes kindly as she studied him.

"I'm very much honored, Mr. Higgins," she said, after a pause. "Oh, yes; I am. And particularly because you don't really know a thing about me."

"I know enough," said Higgins, quickly. "I'm satisfied."

She shook her head.

"No; you don't know enough," she answered.

"Plenty," he affirmed, stoutly. "I know you're the finest woman in the world."

Miss Dean sighed again.

"But if that's all that's worrying you," he added, "you can tell me about yourself. I'll be glad to listen."

Slowly her head moved from side to side.

"It doesn't make any difference what you tell me," he said, "it won't change anything; that's certain. So you can go right ahead; that is, if you like."

"I—I can't tell you anything," she said, and watched the effect of her announcement.

Higgins neither winced nor showed surprise.

"That's all right," he said, nodding. "I'm not asking it; I just thought maybe you'd sooner say something. I love you just the same, Miss Dean, and I'm still asking you to marry me."

There was an instant when it seemed that Miss Dean was about to lose her poise. There was a mixture of trouble and compassion in her eyes.

"It is fine of you," she murmured. "Truly. Understand, I mean that; every word. But—"

He halted her with a sudden gesture.

"Wait," he said. "I don't see where it's fine of me. I'm just asking for what I want; that's all. The trouble is, Miss Dean, I don't know how to go about it right. That is, I can't make it—well, I suppose what they call romantic.

"I'm not built that way. I can't do it the way they do it in plays. And I suppose a woman expects it, too. But for all that I want you to understand that I mean it just as much as the fellow who says it better."

"I know you do," she said firmly. "And I think you say it as well as anybody possibly could. But—"

She hesitated on the ominous word and Higgins braced himself.

"You can go ahead now," he said grimly.

"I can't marry you."

They sat in silence for half a minute and then Higgins lifted a solemn face.

"Is it all right for me to ask why?" he said.

"Why, I—"

Miss Dean was having real difficulty, and it caused her some misgiving as well as surprise.

"Say it right out," he advised.

"Well, I don't love you, Mr. Higgins."

He pondered that for awhile.

"Perhaps not yet," he ventured. "But I'm willing to wait. And I'll be patient, too."

She shook her head.

"It wouldn't be any use to wait, Mr. Higgins. I'm absolutely certain of that."

"Is there anything — particular — about me—I mean anything you don't like?"

"Not at all! Why, I like you very much indeed," she exclaimed. "But that's very different from loving somebody. And, of course, I couldn't marry anybody I didn't love."

"I suppose not," he said. "No; I suppose not. But you might love me, after awhile."

It is often difficult for a lady to tell a gentleman she does not love him. Miss Dean was finding it a rather painful affair.

But it is even more difficult to tell him that by no possibility can he ever hope to be loved, no matter how long may be the fu-

ture. So she merely shook her head, in order to spare him the words.

"Maybe"—he hesitated—"maybe it's because— But I suppose I haven't any business to ask." Then earnestness conquered his reluctance. "I suppose there's somebody else."

"What makes you think so?"

"There must be. You've just got to love somebody, haven't you?"

Miss Dean pondered that.

"I hadn't thought of it that way," she said. "You mean that all of us have to love somebody?

"Well, perhaps that's true. At least, I imagine we ought to. It seems natural, doesn't it?"

"Yes; it's natural," affirmed Higgins gloomily. "And if you do love somebody, Miss Dean, well I hope—"

"Yes?"

His eyes were solemn.

"I hope it isn't— Well, you understand."

"I suppose you mean Mr. Tilley?"

He nodded.

"No," she said. "If I love anybody—remember I'm saying *if*—it is not Mr. Tilley."

Higgins drew a great breath.

"That's something, anyhow," he acknowledged. "Of course, it doesn't seem to help me any—and yet it does, too, in one way; because now I'm satisfied you're not going to run into some awful blunder, Miss Dean. I wouldn't want you to do that."

"It is very good of you to feel that way," she said, her voice sounding very small and somehow contrite.

Higgins got out of his chair and stood clumsily before her.

"Oh, I feel that way, all right," he declared earnestly. "I'll always feel that way. And just so long as you're a free woman, Miss Dean, I'm not going to give up the idea that I've got a chance."

"Please, now, Mr. Higgins!"

He shook his head firmly. And when Higgins was firm there was a solidity about the matter that suggested Gibraltar.

"I can wait," he said patiently. "I won't bother you. I won't even ask you to go fishing, if you don't want to. So long as I know it isn't Tilley I feel better.

"But I did think there was a chance for me. Perhaps it was that picture he showed me. That's something I can't understand, Miss Dean."

She was looking away from him.

"It was you, all right. I couldn't be wrong about that. And it looked like *me*. That was the crazy part. Because it couldn't have been me, and yet—"

He wiped his forehead. "I can't make it out at all. I wish to God it had been me. That's the truest thing I ever said."

"It must have been very puzzling," she said.

"Puzzling?" echoed Higgins. "It was enough to set me crazy. I didn't know for awhile whether I was dreaming or going soft in the bean.

"That's what made me propose to you in such a foolish way. I was excited."

"Was Mr. Tilley excited, too?" she ventured.

"And then some," he said.

"Tell me all you can remember of the picture," she commanded.

Higgins described with as much detail as he could remember. He described almost hopefully, as though possessed of the notion that the photograph might be translated into reality. She nodded gravely when he had finished.

"It must have astonished you," she admitted.

"Lord, yes!"

"Have you any theory?"

"Not yet," he declared grimly. "But I'll have more than a theory when I get through, Miss Dean. I'll have an explanation. I'll get it if I have to wring his neck!"

They talked for a little and then Higgins reached for his old felt hat.

"Good night," he said. "I'm still in the ring, but I'm not going to annoy you any. I can't help being in love with you, can I?"

She watched him as he trudged off across the meadow, and then shook her head half angrily as his figure was lost in the darkness.

"Just now I'm ashamed of myself!" she exclaimed.

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

What Would the Young Man Do?

by Roy K. Moulton

MILLICENT JEFFRIES, the beautiful young author of the popular problem play "Before Breakfast," had just finished reading her latest drama to a dozen playwrights who had gathered in her apartment, and had asked for remarks. The remarks had brought on a stormy argument, participated in by at least five authors whose names were not unfamiliar to theatergoers.

"I maintain," declared Frothingham Jones, a burly giant, "that Miss Jeffries's treatment of the young man was unnatural. Any young man, in his position, held for ransom by a party of kidnapers, would, if he had any red blood in his veins, put up a fight immediately. He would have overpowered his jailors and leaped from a roof to a clump of bushes on the outside of the stone wall. Miss Jeffries's young man was too much of a pacifist to be convincing—"

"You are wrong, as usual," interrupted a very tall, thin man who responded to the name of Randolph Jordan, "and, as usual, you, if writing this scene, would have followed the obvious. I don't say that Miss Jeffries has made this character convincing, but her treatment of him is far more natural than the one you suggest."

"Jordan is right," said a pudgy little party by the name of Pendleton. "This young man, to be a perfectly normal character, would not resort to force, at first. He would be intelligent, and would see the utter futility of it. He would stay on, weeks, if necessary, and would manage to corrupt one of the servants by bribery and promises, and get a note to his friends."

"Eugene Bryant, the young Westerner, wrote a situation somewhat similar to this, into his novel called 'Cupid—Kidnaper,'" said Josephine Green, a woman who had written several successful plays. Miss Green was a lady of avoirdupois and considerable finality of speech. "In his novel, the young man held for ransom, fell in love with the daughter of the man who kidnaped him, and eloped with her by impersonating a servant."

"Those novelists? Bah!" exclaimed Jones. "They are always wrong. Their technique—it is terrible. No conception of dramatic values."

"That theory was impossible," quoth pudgy Mr. Pendleton. "No young man in his position would be in a mood for love."

"It would be out of the question," said Miss Jeffries.

"We are agreed on that, at least," said Frothingham Jones, ponderously. "The young man might fall into many other mental conditions while being held prisoner, but love for the jailor's daughter—too

cheap—too tawdry. That would be the flimsiest sort of melodrama. It would be an author's last resort to get a publisher's check. Ah, no. Whatever a young man in the position of Miss Jeffries's hero would do, he would not fall in love. If he did, Miss Jeffries's career as a playwright would be at an end. Do we put it to a vote?"

"Yes," replied several.

"All who are in favor of eliminating the love element from the situation, during the young man's imprisonment, will manifest by the usual sign."

It was unanimous.

"But," asked Miss Jeffries nervously, "if the young man in my play wouldn't put up a fight, and wouldn't remain passive until death came to his rescue, and wouldn't fall in love with the kidnaper's daughter, what would the young man do?"

"I've an inspiration," declared Pendleton suddenly, slapping his knee.

"The first in twenty years," growled Jordan.

"But we must first go into executive session as a committee of the whole," said Pendleton, glancing about at the doors and windows.

Jerome Winters emerged from his fraternity club in New York late at night and stood on the sidewalk for a moment discussing the shortest way to his hotel. His hat projected over one ear, the second buttonhole of his overcoat encircled the first button, and the gardenia in his lapel hung dejectedly by a mere shred of its stem.

"Some party," ejaculated Mr. Winters. He was not what might be called squiffed. He was only comfortable. He had had a pleasant evening with some old friends, whom he had not seen in a long time.

As he gazed toward the street, trying to make up his mind whether to walk toward Broadway or toward Fifth Avenue, he saw a large, well-appointed limousine. He walked toward it, having a half notion to ride to his hotel. He had just opened his mouth to ask the driver if the machine were engaged, when the door of the car burst open and Mr. Winters was jerked inside. The door was slammed and the car was soon in motion.

A large gloved hand was placed over Mr. Winters's mouth, and he was thrust into the back seat between two men. He could vaguely see, on the forward seat, the forms of two others. His arms were quickly bound behind him, and an uncomfortable but efficient gag was tied over his mouth.

Something was pressed against his side. It felt uncommonly like the business end of an automatic pistol, and a gruff voice said:

"Make a disturbance and you are a dead man."

"That's right," said a pudgy man on the forward seat. "One word and—"

"Shut up Spike," said the gruff party.

Not another word was said as the car hurried up a silent avenue under an elevated railroad and out across a great bridge. Jerome could vaguely distinguish the outlines of the structure in the half-light.

Then they blindfolded him.

On and on they rode, the big car gaining speed with every mile. Through suburban settlements they sped, and finally, when Jerome's senses had begun to return, and he realized that he was being kidnaped, and the stout cord on his arms was beginning to grow unbearable, they turned suddenly in at a large gate and drew up to a substantial cobblestone house.

Winters was hustled out of the car and into the house and was given a seat in a long, low-ceilinged hallway. Then the gruff party removed the blindfold and the gag. The effects of Jerome's evening were beginning to wear off, and he took in the scene with more or less intelligence.

He saw a tall and very heavy man, he of the gruff voice; a short, pudgy, puffy little party whom he recognized as "Spike"; a young and beautiful girl, a middle-aged woman of ample proportions, a small, old-fashioned lady; a tall, thin, sinister-looking man with a red bandanna around his neck, and a half dozen others who were in the background.

He looked carefully for a friendly face, but found none. Every member of that jolly little party scowled at him.

"I probably owe you an explanation, Mr. Winfield," said the large man with the gruff voice.

"I think you are not overstating the case," replied Jerome. "If there can be any possible explanation, I will be charmed to hear it."

"Well," said the gruff party, as he toyed with a long, black mustache and glowered, "we are a party of very desperate people. We are, in short, a gang, if I may be permitted the expression."

"Quite right," interrupted the pudgy party, fumbling a large six-shooter.

"Point that thing the other way," growled the gruff person. "If you are determined to shoot somebody, either accidentally or otherwise, shoot the prisoner."

Spike immediately obtained a new range for his artillery and pointed the muzzle of it directly at Jerome's nose.

"We have taken you for ransom," continued the gruff party. "Before morning we will notify your father, Mr. Winfield. When he delivers twenty-five thousand dollars to our agent, we will release you. It will be quite hopeless for you to try to escape. There is a high, stone wall around the place, and it is well guarded. We will all observe you carefully. We expect to decide a momentous question."

"The question being whether my father will come across with the twenty-five thousand dollars," said Jerome, rising suddenly.

"Look out. He is going to put up a fight and try to get away immediately. I told you any young man would do that," said the tall, thin man with the red bandanna around his neck."

"Keep still, One-Shot," growled the spokesman. "Now, young man, so long as you behave yourself, you will be well treated. That you may know us, I will introduce our party. I am—"

"But," interrupted Jerome, seating himself again, "before you tell me who you are, let me tell you who I am not. I am not the son of Mr. Winfield."

"I would expect you to deny your identity," said the gruff man.

"But, would he do so, in such a position?" demanded the tall, thin man with the red bandanna around his neck.

"Certainly," replied the ringleader. "Such a claim is very transparent."

"Absolutely," agreed Spike, the short and pudgy. "It is the first thing that would happen in a drama. Hero denies his identity—doesn't want to worry poor old father—wins sympathy of audience. From a dramatic standpoint, your position is well taken, young man; but you are not fooling us. Now—"

"My name," broke in the gruff party, "is Missouri Dave Lamont, commonly called 'Desperate Dave.' Does that name suggest anything to you? No? Well, several prosperous seasons of kid-glove financial operations such as the one we are now embarked upon have enabled me to keep this place on Long Island and to live in comparative luxury. I aim to treat my guests well, as long as they behave themselves, and if they don't—"

Missouri Dave scowled horribly at the young man and pulled at the ends of his long, black mustache.

"If he pulls that mustache off," whispered Spike to the tall, thin man, "the beans will be permanently spilled."

"This lady is my wife," continued Missouri Dave, taking the little old-fashioned lady by the hand. "And, this is my daughter Nell," presenting the beautiful young woman. "Nell has proved my best asset. She has never failed me. These gentlemen are my friends and accomplices, Spike and One-Shot," presenting those two persons one after the other. "They will be your personal guard."

"Sixteen men on a dead man's chest—" began Spike in a horrible chant.

"Enough of this," said Nell. "The young man is dead for sleep. Why seek to terrify him further to-night?"

"You are right, as always, Nell," said Missouri Dave. "Spike, conduct your charge to his bedroom."

The charge was led up-stairs and was asleep almost before he touched the pillow. The room lacked nothing in the way of comforts, and a trusted valet named Jean was placed at the disposal of the prisoner. Jean slept on a cot at the foot of the prisoner's bed.

At ten o'clock the next morning the young man was still unconscious of all worry—peacefully sleeping.

Missouri Dave mounted the stairs and found Spike still on guard outside the bedroom door. He was dead for sleep, and was just starting on his fourth box of cigarettes.

"Has the prisoner been quiet during the night?" asked Dave.

"No, he has not," yawned Spike. "He has been uncommonly noisy. His snoring has kept his guard awake."

"You can beat it now for a couple of hours," said Dave. "I will mount guard. Go down on the lawn, where One-Shot is patrolling under the prisoner's window, and tell him he can have a few hours sleep."

Spike crept wearily down-stairs and out on the lawn. After a perplexing search, he found One-Shot asleep in a rosebush.

At noon the whole desperate party with two exceptions, gathered in Missouri Dave's living-room to discuss the situation. Looking through the window they could see the prisoner strolling listlessly in the garden. At his side strolled Nell, the daughter of desperation. Perched upon the wall, and holding across his knees an ancient dueling pistol, sat Jean the valet. Whenever Jerome looked in his direction, Jean picked up the pistol gingerly, and with infinite care, aimed it at that young man.

"Well, what is the young man going to do?" asked the portly lady.

"One thing he is not going to do, Josephine," replied Missouri Dave; "one thing he is not going to do is to put up a fight."

"I told you the other night he wouldn't," said One-Shot, removing his red bandanna temporarily and exercising his neck by stretching it this way and that. "So long as the ordinary young man is comfortable and well-treated he won't put up a fight. What's the use? There are no *D'Artagnans* any more."

"I hope Fordham doesn't let that gun off and injure the young man," said the little old-fashioned lady. "Fordham belongs to the realistic school, you know."

"Quite impossible, my dear," replied Missouri Dave. "It hasn't been loaded since Aaron Burr owned it, and besides, I took the extra precaution of removing the hammer before I gave it to Fordham."

"One thing worries me," said Josephine, "the young party stoutly insists that he is not Mr. Winfield's son."

"That is the natural thing for him to do," insisted Spike.

"In drama, perhaps, but not in real life," returned Miss Green.

"In real life, too," said One-Shot. "I have mentioned that in my notes."

"And so have I," said Spike.

Each pulled from his pocket a sheaf of notes. Spike started to read.

"Another time, gentlemen," said Missouri Dave. "Notes are no treat to us. We are all taking them, except mother. I have only one faint worry, and that is due to the fact that the young man doesn't seem to be much terrified. But he will be in a few days.

"I have an idea," said Spike.

"This whole thing is your idea," said Dave. "Don't ever forget that."

"My idea," said Spike, "is to throw a slight scare into him. Treat him to a little polite torture. He will not show his true nature until he is aroused. Just now he is too placid."

They all looked out into the garden and saw Nell stooping to pluck a flower, and Jerome watching her with more than ordinary interest. Jean was scowling on the wall and occasionally squinting along the barrel of his trusty weapon.

"Millicent is not terrifying him much," observed Josephine Green, not without a note of sarcasm.

"She feels sorry for the young fellow," said the little old-fashioned lady. "And it is natural that she should."

"The daughter of a desperado, such as I, should not feel sorry for anybody. She should be thinking of the twenty-five thousand dollars," said Missouri Dave.

"I allow that a little refined torture would help bring out the characteristics of any man who is held in bondage," said Spike. "Why not put him down in the dark coal-cellar and feed him on bread and water for a day or two? We can't let this thing die on our hands. What are we going to gain if the young man submits and stays here forever, strolling with Millicent and plucking flowers?"

"Surely you would not do that, Froth-

ingham," pleaded the little old-fashioned lady. "Remember this is our home, and should any harm come to the young man—"

"Why not?" demanded Spike. "Old man Winfield told us we could go as far as we liked short of actual starvation or assault, didn't he?"

"Sure," agreed One-Shot. "We have got to stir him up."

"I agree with you, boys," said Missouri Dave. "But we have got to go at this thing cautiously. Just what did the old man say?"

"Mr. Winfield said he had no objection to the kidnaping of his son for a week or two. He thought a scare would do him good and straighten him up and teach him to appreciate his own home," said One-Shot. "When Pendleton and I went to see him, he fell in with the idea at once. He said he wouldn't mind a black eye or two. If we could get the young fellow thoroughly peeved, he might come to his senses."

"He wouldn't care to have us go as far as manslaughter," interrupted Spike, "but anything short of that would have his sanction. One thing he was particular about. He said not to allow the young man to fall in love with anybody during this experience. His son has a mania for love-affairs, having as many as three or four at one time. We both assured him that such an eventuality was impossible, at least from a good dramatic standpoint. The technique of such a thing would be faulty from every rule known to dramatic writing."

"There is a stout padlock on the coal cellar," mused Missouri Dave.

"That's the idea!" exclaimed Spike.

"Then you boys go and get him and bundle him into the cellar," said Dave. "There will be four of you, counting Jean, and you should have little trouble."

It was not without some hesitation that Spike, One-Shot, and a third gentleman known as Bloody Mike embarked upon their enterprise, while Dave went downstairs to prepare the coal cellar for its occupant.

They crept around an angle of the house and beckoned to Jean, making several mysterious signs which he seemed to understand—all this behind the prisoner's back.

As the three advanced upon Jerome, he turned suddenly and faced them. Millicent gasped, and, turning to him, urged him to flee.

"They are desperate men," she said.

"Fly and leave you with this gang?" said Jerome. "Not yet."

"I beg you to," she breathed. "They will not harm me. My father will protect me."

Jerome made no reply. He gazed steadily at the approaching trio, and the spirit of the old Cornell days seemed to take possession of him. With a fiendish yell, he crouched and met them in the middle of a broad gravel walk.

In the twinkling of an eye, Bloody Mike landed in the midst of a large syringa-bush, Spike was rolled conveniently away beneath a wheelbarrow which had been left there, and One-Shot was limping away toward the house as rapidly as possible. He was dragging one foot behind him, in a manner of speaking. He never looked back.

From the wall sprang Jean and landed squarely on the back of Jerome, attacking him from the rear and trying to bear him to the ground.

Millicent screamed and tried to pull Jean away. The young English playwright, Fordham, forgot that he was a valet, and put up a nasty fight. Jerome finally subdued him with a square poke under the left ear, and, while he was yet groggy, picked him up, carried him to the wall, and hoisted him up in his place. Then he picked up the old dueling pistol, laid it across Jean's knees, brushed the dust from his coat, and went back to the flower-bed and resumed his conversation with Millicent.

As he looked toward the house, he observed the portly lady sitting in a wicker chair with a broad arm, making notes on a pad of paper with feverish haste. The young man was doing something at last, and she missed no detail of it.

The three heroes, as if by mutual agreement, reached the coal cellar at about the same time.

"Where is the prisoner?" demanded Missouri Dave.

Spike was the first to find voice, although he was puffing considerably.

"I have reconsidered my plan," he said.

"Yes," said Bloody Mike. "It would be a mistake to apply torture or close confinement to the young man just now."

"You're a fine lot of conspirators," growled Dave. "How are we going to liven him up?"

"He doesn't exactly need that," said One-Shot sorrowfully, rubbing his aching shin. "He is fairly well alive now. If he is your idea of a dead one, you have another guess coming."

"Well, what's to be done?" demanded Dave.

"Nothing—by me," panted Spike.

"Nor by me," said Bloody Mike.

"A quiet surveillance would be best," said One-Shot.

"Not on your life," exploded Dave. "I'll let the matter rest for to-night, but to-morrow—"

The matter rested not only that night, but the next and the next. The prisoner was very comfortable. He ate well and slept well. He was given the freedom of the place, and everywhere he looked he observed conspirators with note-books. But they were taking no notes.

Jean sat on the wall with a note-book. He licked a pencil from time to time and stared at the prisoner, but the latter did nothing but walk among the flowers and chat with Millicent.

"She's a traitor," sneered Josephine one afternoon. "Look at her now."

The others rushed to the window. Millicent was just attaching a rosebud to the lapel of Jerome.

"The old man told us not to allow his son to fall in love," warned Spike. "He was almighty particular about that. He has his own ideas for the young man."

There was considerable consternation in the camp.

"We all agreed that a young man in his position could not do that," said Dave, "and I am of the same opinion still. It would violate all the ethics of modern playwriting. The natural thing is what our heroines and heroes cannot do, in any event."

While they were speaking a servant came in with a special delivery letter.

Frothingham, alias Missouri Dave, took the letter quickly, and as he glanced through it his face turned a sickly gray.

"Listen," he gasped as they gathered around. "Let me read this aloud."

"New York City.

"MR. FROTHINGHAM JONES,
"The Willows,
"Sandy Beach, Long Island.

"DEAR SIR: You are a fine lot of kidnapers.

"I have your telegram stating that you have my son in your care, and that he is well and apparently happy.

"My son is here with me. He has not been out of New York, worse luck. He is in his room sleeping off the effects of the end of a perfect day as I write.

"It seems you picked up the wrong man at my son's club the other evening. I suppose you know the extent of your danger in this situation. I hope you may work your way out of it without a series of damage suits, but I don't see how you can.

"Respectfully, my desperadoes,
"JAMES W. WINFIELD."

For some moments no one spoke.

Spike was the first to recover. "Well, it's your house, Frothingham. You're his jailer. The rest of us are not liable."

"But it is your plan!" thundered Frothingham.

"We must help poor Frothingham to get out of this mess," said Josephine Green. "After all, we have gained something; not much, perhaps, but something."

She was thinking of her notes.

"We must get rid of him at once," suggested One-Shot.

"Fine idea," said Frothingham sadly. "But don't furnish us the puzzle without giving us the key. How?"

"I have an idea," said Spike suddenly.

"Another?" groaned Frothingham.

"Yes," said Spike. "Go and tell him he is free to depart; that his father has paid the ransom."

"I don't think you could make him believe that," said the little old-fashioned lady. "He confided in me last evening that his father died in 1903 and he entertained no hope of having the ransom paid."

"Well," insisted Spike, "it's worth trying."

"Yes," agreed One-Shot. "Let's chase him. I'll be glad to have this damned red handkerchief off my neck—pardon, ladies."

"I'll go and tell him," said Frothingham. "It's one chance in a hundred, but it may work. He has got us for sure, if he wants to make trouble."

"I have a better plan than that," suggested Josephine. "Let Millicent fall in love with him, and let him fall in love with Millicent. After that, he would make no trouble, I am sure."

"Never!" thundered Frothingham. "I have taken my stand on the question. It's not ethical. It would be a cheap, amateurish dénouement, and I'll not stand for it. I thought we had all agreed on that."

"It's impossible," said Spike. "I'd rather stand a lawsuit than to have my ideals shattered in that way."

"Very well," said Josephine significantly. "I've done my best to set you right."

"Why not try this?" suggested little Mrs. Frothingham. "Leave the way open for him to escape. Don't say anything to him about the ransom. Let Mr. Jordan, One-Shot, as you call him, go to sleep on guard to-night right in the middle of the lawn, where the prisoner can see him. Have Jean, the valet, disappear. Leave the front gate wide open, and, lastly, have Spike go to sleep in the hall while on guard and snore so loudly that the prisoner can hear him. The way will then be open to him, and it will be easy for him to lower himself to the ground and escape."

"The very idea," said Frothingham enthusiastically. "Mother, you're a wonder."

"My part of it will not be difficult," said Jordan.

"Nor mine," echoed Spike Pendleton.

And so it was agreed.

In the garden there was another conflict—a conflict in the heart of Millicent Jeffries, the unconscious cause of all this tumult. She had taken more than a passing interest in the handsome young prisoner.

For two days she had debated the advisability of telling him the truth.

They were wandering among the flowerbeds at the very moment the important conference was taking place in the house.

Jean, sitting on the stone wall, overheard much of the conversation. He was not an eavesdropper, but they seemed oblivious to his presence.

He stood it as long as he could, and then quietly fell backward off the wall, into a large bush, leaving the garden prison unpatrolled.

"There is something I have on my mind, Nell," said Jerome, taking her hand and looking into her eyes.

Millicent turned away, and, looking over toward the house, said:

"My name is not Nell. I should have told you before. My name is Millicent. I am a playwright. Missouri Dave is not my father. He is also a playwright. Now you have the truth. I suppose you will have small regard for me."

"It's fifty-fifty," replied Jerome cheerfully. "My name is not Winfield."

"So you have said before," replied Millicent. "I have thought all along that you were denying your identity to shield your father."

"My name is Jerome Winters," said Jerome. "That's my little name. My home is in Denver, and I am a mining engineer. Do you believe me?"

"Yes, of course," said Millicent as she gazed steadily into his eyes.

At this point Jean fell off the wall. He was too full of information. He landed safely in the bush, outside the wall, and hurried around to the house, where he arrived out of breath, but not out of news.

"He has told his real name, and it's on the level, too," declared Jean. "He is not Winfield, that's a cinch. Somebody has pulled an awful bone."

"Old stuff," grunted Spike. "Go back and guard the wall."

Jean was glad to get away. He was not fond of funerals, and the conclave assembled was not unlike one.

Reaching his old post on the wall and rescuing his pistol, Jean saw Jerome and Millicent in deep conversation, but they were moving slowly away. They had not even noticed his absence.

"It is impossible," said Millicent. "We are agreed that such a dénouement would be mediocre."

"But I love you," said Jerome earnestly. "I cannot go back home without you. I shall stay here, a prisoner, until you give your consent."

"But there was a similar situation in 'Cupid—Kidnaper,' and we all agreed that the author of that book adopted a cheap course in making the hero fall in love when he should have been thinking of obtaining his freedom. It sounded like a penny-thriller."

"I don't care about 'Cupid—Kidnaper,' or its author, or Missouri Dave, or Spike, or anybody or anything in the world but you!" pleaded Jerome.

And they moved so far away that Jean could hear nothing more.

The gang retired early that night. By eight o'clock the house was in darkness. The light in Jerome's room was the only one to be seen. His valet, Jean, was missing, but he thought little of that. His guard at the hall door had gone to sleep, and a loud and penetrating snore was all that came from that direction. It was the most artistic snoring Jerome had ever heard.

He walked to the window and looked out. He could plainly see, stretched upon the lawn, the form of his guard. His rifle lay some feet away from him, and the man was evidently fast asleep. He observed that the large iron gate in the wall was hanging open.

"I have tired them out at last," he thought. "They have forgotten the usual precautions. Now for it. I didn't hope to get away until at least an hour later."

It was the work of a moment to tie two blankets together and lower himself to the ground. He landed safely and crept away in the darkness.

As he disappeared, an excited lady of ample proportions, who had concealed herself behind a rain-barrel at the corner of the house, whispered:

"He has gone."

"Thank God," replied a gruff voice.

"Our troubles are over," said the stout lady.

"Now to get rid of this mustache," said Frothingham.

"And this damned red handkerchief," said One-Shot, who had crept to them from his position on the lawn.

"Now to the library, and we will compare notes," announced Frothingham.

Each produced a bundle of notes, which had been taken during the days which had just elapsed. All of them touched upon the actions of the young man while a prisoner.

There were five in the party. Millicent had retired early. She was tired out, and they did not rouse her.

It was about midnight, and Bloody Mike was reading the notes he had made, when the sound of deep snoring—awful snoring—came down the stairway.

"My Heavens, we have forgotten Pendleton!" said Josephine.

"Sure enough," said Frothingham. "Jean and I will go up-stairs and wake him up. He shouldn't miss this discussion."

Frothingham and Jean went up-stairs, and were amazed to find Pendleton wide awake, sitting on the floor in front of the prisoner's door, and snoring like a sea-lion.

"I thought you were asleep," said Frothingham.

"Asleep, nothing," said Pendleton. "I haven't closed my eyes. I never snore when I'm asleep, so I had to stay awake. Did I do a good job?"

"Excellent," said Frothingham; "but you can stop now. The prisoner has made his escape."

"How long ago?" demanded Pendleton.

"About four hours," said Frothingham.

"And you kept me here to snore unnecessarily for four hours? My Heavens, man, do you know the agony I have been through? I have imitated the sawmill and every kind of wild animal in the jungle and all the birds that fly and all the fish that swim. I have been through all the imitations five or six times. I couldn't stand straight snoring for more than an hour, and then I had to adopt variations to keep from going crazy. You're a fine lot of friends. You forgot me—admit it, you lobster."

"Oh, forget it," said Fordham, alias Jean. "Come on down-stairs and have a

drink and read us the notes you have taken."

"I can't," said Pendleton. "My voice is so husky I can hardly talk. Me for bed and the first sleep I have had since we started on this fool stunt."

"Your own idea," reminded Frothingham.

"Good night!" roared Pendleton with great finality. "Wake me up next week."

But it was not next week when Pendleton heard a tapping on his door; it was, in fact, only seven o'clock the next morning.

"Come in!" he bawled.

"Not so loud," commanded Frothingham as he entered and noiselessly closed the door behind him.

His face was ashen and he was trembling like a man who had seen an apparition.

"What do you think has happened?" asked Frothingham.

"I never think," said Pendleton. "It violates the ethics. When I feel a think coming on, I just sit down and snore four or five hours."

"Well," hissed Frothingham, "he is back!"

"Back!" almost screamed Pendleton.

"Sure," said Frothingham. "The big boob is in his own room sleeping as peacefully as a child. I went in there to remove the blanket-robe and close the window—and there he was."

"What next?" demanded Jordan, who had followed Frothingham into the room. "What next, Pendleton? You're the big fixer, you know."

"Next—" said Pendleton, jumping out of bed, "next, I am going to beat it for town. You are a wide lot of mutts. When he left, why, in the name of the three-toed giant sloth, didn't you go and shut the window and lock it so he couldn't get back?"

"That would not have been good technique," said Frothingham. "Besides, we didn't think of it."

"Technique be blowed!" snorted Pendleton. "I'm going home. You make me ill."

"Over my dead body you'll go home," said Frothingham.

"Well, what shall we do?" capitulated Pendleton.

"We are going to have this young jail-invader down after breakfast and talk it over with him, and find out what's what."

And that is what happened.

Jerome entered the library calmly and bowed to the assembled conspirators, Millicent among them.

"Look here," demanded Frothingham, "what are you going to do?"

"Nothing," said Jerome pleasantly. "I am quite well content."

"I told you he would do nothing," snapped Josephine, giving Millicent a side-long glance with a punch in it.

"You are in a position to make us some trouble, you know," said Frothingham. "It was an awkward mistake. Now, if you will go quietly—"

"Yes, it was an awkward mistake," agreed Jerome. "The notes I have taken during these days will, no doubt, agree with the notes you have all taken on that point."

"Notes!" interrupted Josephine, amazed.

"Yes," replied Jerome. "Every time I looked up I saw somebody hastily concealing a writing-pad; so I began taking notes myself. But I am not going to cause you any trouble. I will just stay on here two or three months and be happy. The climate here is delightful."

"The climate is not bad," said Pendleton, "but we are not running a summer-resort hotel."

"I am not going to cause you any trouble," repeated Jerome, and he fussed with his necktie nervously; "because I have fallen deeply in love with one of your number."

He looked tenderly upon Millicent, who blushed becomingly and, rising, went to his side.

"Impossible!" exploded Frothingham.

"Unheard-of!" shrieked Pendleton. "No young man placed in your position would do such a thing."

"You, young lady," said Frothingham, glaring at Millicent, "have aided and abetted the violation of our most sacred tradition—the best tradition of good playwriting."

The young lady said nothing, and said it

very eloquently. She merely gazed at Jerome and smiled.

Frothingham walked up and down the room and raved.

"We agreed that it could not happen!" he panted. Suddenly he turned to Jerome.

"Now that you have wrecked our pet theory and given us several days of trouble besides," he said, "perhaps you will consider your revenge complete and will leave us. Millicent, come away from that man."

As if in reply to this command, Jerome placed his arm about the girl's waist and said calmly:

"When I go, my wife will go with me."

"Your wife!" howled Frothingham.

Josephine sighed complacently. She had been right, after all. Pendleton collapsed on the sofa and gasped for breath.

"Sure," said Jerome. "She was waiting for me with the roadster when I made my escape last night. I didn't expect to get away so early, but she was there. We drove over to the county seat, were married, and were back here a little after midnight. We had no trouble getting back to our rooms. You were all very much engrossed in your notes in the library."

"Well, I'll be swizzled!" snorted Frothingham. "I tell you such a thing can't happen. I'm asleep and dreaming, that's all."

Jerome produced a marriage-certificate.

"Say," queried Frothingham weakly, "who in thunderation are you, anyhow?"

"Jerome Winters, a mining engineer from Denver, as I have told you from the start," replied Jerome.

"Do you know that this love-affair is a positive crime against decent literature and drama?" inquired Frothingham. "It's an outrage. It has happened only once in similar circumstances, and that was in a fool novel called 'Cupid—Kidnaper,' written by some gawk who didn't care how he wounded the pride of his contemporaries. You have read the frightful thing, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Jerome; "I wrote it."

"You!" exclaimed Josephine. "Oh, no; we have got you there. That silly thing was written by a man named Eugene Bryant."

"My pen-name," said Jerome. "I dash off a good seller occasionally, just for relaxation."

"Well, I'll be damned!" roared Frothingham.

"Oh, hardly that," replied Jerome. "You have really done me a good turn, old chap. Well, good-by, everybody. We're going to Denver to-night. Thank you for a glorious time."

And Jerome and Millicent went out, arm in arm.

"What would the young man do?" hissed Frothingham sarcastically.

"They're liable to do anything, in real life," yawned Pendleton. "I'm glad I write only farces. I'm going back to bed."

A LOVER'S PRAYER

BY LESLIE RAMÓN

YOU, who hold for us
A fate unseen,
Guide and shape our destiny while here
To sacred keep our troth.
And when the mantled reaper,
At Your bidding, walks between
This life and Your beyond,
Let him not cast his shroud
O'er one alone, but both.

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

IF your ideal of life is a sufficiency of creature comforts, take the middle road of common sense and keep it. But all the promoters of this safe and sane success—bankers, schoolmasters, vestrymen, and grandparents—will never be able to extinguish the divine fire of romance in the heart of a born adventurer. One who sees west of the sun and east of the moon would rather enlarge his heart in the wilds of an African jungle or pick his way across the trackless snows of the north than to wrap himself in eider-down conventional comforts, while his will grows soft and his muscles atrophy. Every corner of this world holds out rich returns in enlarged experience and fascinating fun for men of action who can stake their claim and work it.

If circumstance more than conscience makes men tame animals, robbing us of initiative and converting us into orthodox brokers and bakers and family builders, we never fully strangle the call of the winds and the wave. In the stimulating experience of others we vicariously satisfy our passion for the primitive. We are all in debt to the great adventurers of fiction who have carried us imaginatively where our feet could never reach. To every desk and domestic slave, surfeited with the daily grind, fed-up with the safety of the middle of the roadway of life, we commend the brilliant two-part story which opens in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY—

THE YELLOW LORD

BY WILL LEVINGTON COMFORT

This finished story, by one of America's most distinguished writers, takes place on the island of Pandiñao, and carries you into the very heart of a Chinese mystery, where the brains of an American and a Britisher are pitted against an enemy within the gates, supported by the Island Malays. Here the Yellow Lord, surrounded by the circumstance of an Oriental potentate, was making his last stand for the perpetuation of a system which carried the profits of the Tsui Tsing Trading Company, not only into China, but into England as well, and did not hesitate to debase the bodies and the souls of the Chinese tea-gatherers in the process.

Comfort, who can always be trusted to pass over the prosaic and to touch only the dramatic, has here woven a tale that from the first moment of Jack Bowditch's notice of the advertisement in the *North China News* to the culmination of his sojourn in the island of Pandiñao is replete with that realistic romance, which, while it satisfies the passion of the heart for adventure, at the same time feeds the mind with the matured observations of a man who has thought as well as adventured.

Don't miss the opening. We can promise you a rich reward for your pains, and at the same time, we beg to remind you, here is a dollar and a half book which you will get for twenty cents, and weeks before the book itself appears.

MECHANICALLY we repeat the formulas we have been taught to accept as the wisdom of the race, and as mechanically we dismiss them for all practical purposes. "Blood's thicker than water" falls trippingly from the budding sociologist, and they go on to manufacture uplift sirup for home and foreign consumption. No one wants to throw stones at the misguided but per-

fectly sincere, if self-chosen, messengers who elect to carry the seeds of civilization into Asia and Africa.

Not only does it never occur to these propagandists of the West that these people might be consulted in the matter of the acceptance of a gift of doubtful value, but they continually lose sight of the fact that no accidents of food or clothes or education can alter the fundamental differences Nature herself implanted when she laid the boundaries of East and West.

The cowl never made the monk, and our universities and schools can never change the nature of a man by changing his speech or his clothes. As long as "blood is thicker than water," so long is East, East and West, West, and when you try to carry the moral outlook of the one into the physical horizons of the other, you are sure to get a convincing, and ofttime a tragic confirmation of the essential differences in race.

Our next week's novelette—

AND NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET

BY KATHARINE METCALF ROOF

is a brilliant and dramatic exposition of the irreconcilability of the standards of two civilizations, and the inevitable triumph of inherited instincts over the paper barriers of a foreign education. The queen of Istrahan had been educated in America, but she fell in love in her native country, and the conflict makes this fascinating tale, which a gifted author of rare feeling and imagination tells with consummate art and skill.

ROMANCE has more disguises than a German spy, and mystery thrives as comfortably within a small-town pine-turret as in the sumptuous setting of an English baronial hall. There are no time-clocks and no fixed routes by which to measure the advent of either. You leave your office at night and descend to the ground floor, an unbroken habit for more years than you care to remember; and lo! as you step out into the street, your eyes look into another's, and never is the world the same again. You drop off the Southern Limited, your mind preoccupied with the new job and motors and sales and things, and as you pass up the shaded residential section of old New Orleans you see a white, girlish figure on a decayed front porch, and— Get the rest of it in Frances O. J. Gaither's story, "THE HAND FROM THE DARK," in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

JUST now some of the best of the young men of America are turning their faces toward salt water. Our big new merchant fleet needs seamen, fire-room men, and expert mechanics; and although some of the picturesqueness has gone from the sailor's calling since the day of the clippers, the romance of the sea keeps its grip on the imaginations of countless adventurous young men —and some who are no longer young—many of whom have never seen any greater body of water than an inland lake. Yet in spite of this deep and widespread interest in sailoring, most of us must do our seafaring between the covers of books and magazines, and depend upon those members of the writing fraternity who have made voyages far to take us with them in their salt-water adventuring. Such a writer is H. Keith Trask, whose fine sea yarn, "MR. MACCALLION, LIBERATOR," you will find in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY. It's a story of a new captain with an enlarged head, a fourth engineer with a queer hobby, and some dusky-hued patriots; and there isn't a dull line in it.

OF late other interests have taken our thoughts away from the Mexican Border, but the border is still there, with all its heat, thirst, dust, cactus, bandits on the Mexican side—and romance on both sides of the line that divides the United States from our sorely troubled sister republic to the south. And it is romance that Herman Howard Matteson gives us in "WITH MUCH GUSTO" in next week's issue—the romance of an American school-teacher and a Mexican boy with the heart of a grandee of Spain. It is very well worth reading.

ONCE upon a time France and England—or, rather, France and the English colony of Massachusetts—were fighting for the possession of Nova Scotia. Gallant men of both nations battled through the wilderness in the service of their kings and countries; dared death in battle, at the hands of hostile Indians, from the fierce elements of the northland—yet fought fairly and chivalrously. That was in the days before science provided the soldier with such weapons as poison gas and the machine gun; when success in war was won by the soldier's flintlock and the officer's sword. It is of this almost forgotten warfare that William Holloway tells in his galloping romantic story, "THE BROKEN LOUIS D'OR," in the next issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. It tells of the adventures of two masters of the sword, of a charming French girl, and of a golden coin broken by a Spanish astrologer. It will lift you out of a workaday world into a land of pure romance.

"BROADWAY BAB" WINS

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for years. It is the only one I care for any more. I used to read a half-dozen magazines, and some of them I liked fairly well, but some of them have too many war stories; I don't care for them. It is not that I am unpatriotic, but I think the

people have had enough war without having it put into fiction.

When I first started to read the ALL-STORY, in the *Cavalier* days, my husband used to say, up until lately: "What do you want to buy so many magazines for? Why don't you sew or do fancy-work in the evening? You've always got your nose in a book."

He is not much of a reader himself. I thought of a way to fix him.

I started reading "Broadway Bab" to him. He got so interested that he could hardly wait for each new issue. Then I read "The Untamed," and now I'm reading "After His Own Heart" to him.

He can see now why I was always crazy to get the new book. He likes the stories so well that he bought a year's subscription and gave it to me as a Christmas present.

The Western stories are our favorite ones.

I think we should have a sequel to "The Untamed." You must not leave *Kate Cumberland* broken hearted and *Whistling Dan* riding off to nowhere.

A new writer to the Heart to Heart Talks,

MRS. L. O. GRIFFITH.

Seattle, Washington.

INSISTS ON SEQUEL TO "THE UNTAMED"

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY nearly three years, and I must say that I never read a better magazine. The stories within its ample pages are always highly interesting and deeply entertaining. When I pick up the magazine and sit down to read, the hours fly past at a tremendous gallop.

I think that Max Brand, Jackson Gregory, and Frank L. Packard are the leading authors of your invincible, unsurpassable magazine. Ah, yes, I forgot Edgar Rice Burroughs, the creator of *Tarzan*. "H. R. H. the Rider," by him, certainly was literature. "The Untamed," Max Brand's most recent story, surely was an amazing piece of fiction. His style, his vivid portrayal of Western life is unsurpassed; perhaps Jackson Gregory equals him. It was a shame the way the story ended! But now we have the right to expect a sequel—and what's more, we demand it. By June Mr. Brand had better have the sequel appearing in this magazine. We must allow time for *Dan* to return with the geese, and time for him to have another adventure. About June, then—if not sooner. May *Dan* have good luck in the South, where the geese have gone.

"After His Own Heart," by Ben Ames Williams, is a jewel, though it is not yet completed. But I expect it to be among the others at the top. "The Murder Ship" and "Trapped" were excellent stories. I have perused other magazines in the interim while I patiently wait for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY to put in an appearance on Thursdays, and I have discovered that they fall far below the horizon of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY when it comes to stories. Besides what is within this gem of a magazine there is the cover, which is always attractive. When I enter the drug-store, cast my eye upon the rack, I always see it first—because its cover is so conspicuous—always in the limelight, and the other magazines hanging unobtrusively upon the rack, form a dim background for this unsurpassable book.

Being somewhat an artist myself, I admire and appreciate the cover. The most happy moments of my young life have been passed with this magazine, which I hold high above all others. Even my brother, who never favored reading, has become an inveterate reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and until he has finished the week's program in your magazine he ceases not to read. I have recommended your magazine to all my friends. Those who have taken to reading it are glad that they have done so; and I have been thanked a number of times for advising them.

The short stories are of the best; though at times one or two fall beneath the standard. Here is a list of the novelettes which were of the best: "Doris Dances," "The Brute-Breaker," "His Grace," "The Voice in the Wall," "No Partners," and many others, too numerous to mention. "The Gun Brand" was great; "Three in a Thousand" also; "White Tigers," by Mr. Sheehan, was grand and I am pleased to see that next week there appears another story by this author. Well, I had best conclude, for I have consumed too much space now. With best wishes to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, the best magazine ever,

NICKOLAS MACARI.

L. Box 722, Clinton, Indiana.

LIKES HISTORICAL STORIES

TO THE EDITOR:

A few weeks ago as I was coming home from the movies I stepped into the drug-store to get some candy, and as I passed the magazine-stand I noticed the ALL-STORY WEEKLY of December 14. I purchased it, and now I would not like to miss any number of your fine magazine.

The stories I like best are imaginative adventure, mystery; and my favorite authors are Edgar Rice Burroughs and Robert Ames Bennet. I have read in the Heart to Heart Talks that you would like the readers to write and give their opinion of historical stories, and I must tell you that I like them very much, and would be very pleased to see a historical serial in your splendid magazine in the near future. How about it? If you have room in the Heart to Heart Talks I wish you would kindly tell me in what numbers of your magazine the following stories appeared; also the price and whether they are serials, novelettes, or short stories, as I would very much like to purchase them: "The Pirate Woman," "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," by J. U. Giesy; "The

Moon Pool," by A. Merritt; "The Argus Pheasant" and "Koyala the Beautiful," by John Charles Beecham. I forgot to mention your novelettes, but they are wonderful. You may use this in the Heart to Heart Talks if you wish.

F. S. STEWART.

Kansas City, Missouri.

NOTE: "The Pirate Woman," by Captain Dingle, ALL-STORY WEEKLY, November 2 to 23, 1918 (four-part serial); "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," by J. U. Giesy, July 13 to August 10, 1918 (five-part serial); "The Moon Pool," by A. Merritt, June 22, 1918 (novelette); "The Argus Pheasant," by John Charles Beecham, February 3 to March 3, 1917 (five-part serial); "Koyala the Beautiful," sequel to "The Argus Pheasant," August 10 to September 14, 1918 (six-part serial). We can supply the issues containing these stories for twenty cents each.

"NOTHING BUT PRAISE"

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for the past five years. I first started taking it when it went under the title of the *All-Story Cavalier*, and thought so much of it that I never would miss a copy of it since. I'll do without my daily and Sunday paper, and even without a meal, before I would do without the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Lately I've been having a lot of trouble about getting certain numbers from the news-dealers, so intend to send in a subscription for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY as soon as I get back to work, which I expect to do in another week. I couldn't get the following numbers: September 28, 1918; January 4 and 18, 1919, so I am sending a money order and stamps for forwarding them. If you would please send them to me as soon as you can, I will be very much obliged to you.

Speaking of favorite authors, Burroughs is my favorite; after him come Jackson Gregory, E. J Rath, Max Brand, J. U. Giesy, Hulbert Footner, Ben Ames Williams, C. N. and A. M. Williamson, Edgar Franklin, Ogden, Frank Packard, and Isabel Ostrander. In fact I like almost all the stories, and the few I don't, I skip over, as I think that what I don't care for is probably just what another one would like.

I don't see how your magazine could be better. I have no kicks; nothing but praise. Also I think you people should have everybody's heartfelt thanks in keeping the price of your magazine down in these hard times, when the other magazines went up in price. I am sending my thanks and three rousing-good cheers for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Long may it prosper, and also the people who combine to make it what it is. Hoping soon to see the above-named magazines, I am, as ever, an ALL-STORY WEEKLY booster,

MRS. A. COLBURN.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

Enclosed you will find twenty-five cents in coin, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for January 4, 1919, and January 11, 1919, as I have been unable to purchase them at the news-stand. I have just started the last mystery story, "The Crimson Alibi." I think it's great, as I have just started the first part, and I can't wait very patiently for the parts that come, because you *always* have the story that I am looking for. I just finished "Broadway Bab"; it's a treat; also "H. R. H. the Rider." Many other stories I like; "Lady of the Night Wind," "The Silver Cipher." I always read the Heart to Heart Talks, and I find that I am not the only one looking for a sequel to "The Moon Pool." It was very interesting, but ended too suddenly. Must wish the ALL-STORY WEEKLY best of luck, as my letter will be too long. BORGHILD ANDERSON.

29 Treadwell Avenue,
Port Richmond, Staten Island.

Enclosed find thirty cents in coin, for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for December 28, 1918, and January 5, 1919. I failed to get these two copies at the news-stands, so am trying this means of obtaining them. Am very much interested in "Broadway Bab," by Johnston McCulley, and "H. R. H. the Rider," by E. R. Burroughs, and would like to finish them. Your short stories and serials are tip-top, and I enjoy reading them very much. Thanking you in advance, and trusting you will send me these two copies—December 28 and January 5. Wishing you and the ALL-STORY WEEKLY *much success*,

MRS. ANNA C. NOBBS.

R. F. D. 5,
Nashville, Tennessee.

Having been a reader of your ALL-STORY WEEKLY for about a year, I want to say I have read a great number of books, but for all-round fiction it is the best ever. Have just finished reading "The Untamed," by Max Brand, and please tell him it was great, but would like to have *Dan* of that story return so we will know who he is. Also tell him to hurry with another. Max Brand and Edgar Franklin are my favorite authors, but they are all fine. Never mind publishing my name, but please put this in Heart to Heart Talks. G. C. SMILEY.

Lyons, Iowa.

For some time I have thought of writing to see if there can't be a sequel to "Koyala the Beautiful"; "The Texan" also deserves a sequel. "Everyman's Land" was fine; also "One Bright Idea," "The Black Butterfly," "Broadway Bab," "Six Feet Four," "The Brute-Breaker," "His Grace," "Sarah Worth's Feud," "The Pirate Woman," and many others. "Claire" was simply

great; can't we have some more stories by the same author? Have just finished "The Untamed"; it was good, but the ending was a trifle disappointing. I am now reading "After His Own Heart" and "The Crimson Alibi"; they both promise to be good. Hoping you keep the good work up, DOROTHY HALL.

Commerce, Oklahoma.

I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *The Argosy* for almost two years. I think they are the best magazines published. I have read all of E. R. Burroughs's books and continued stories. I think that "H. R. H. the Rider" is fine. I sure would like to see some more of the *Tarzan* stories. "The Untamed," by Max Brand, is one of the best continued stories I have ever read. Mr. Burroughs will have to go some to beat that one. I hope to hear some more of E. R. Burroughs and Max Brand. Try and get Mr. Burroughs to write some more *Tarzan* stories. With best regards for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *The Argosy*, I remain, DAVID H. WOOLDRIDGE.

U. S. Army Base,
Norfolk, Virginia.

I am now a reader of your great and happy family of readers. I like "different" stories and Western stories the best of all your very good stories. I had the good fortune to read "The King of Conserve Island" and the bad fortune to miss "The Planeteer," "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," and dear old Edgar Rice Burroughs's stories of Mars. E. R. Burroughs is the best of the best of good writers. Who wrote "Thuvia, Maid of Mars," and what issues were they in, and what will it cost to get them from you? I will not wish you success, because I know you will have success. LEO FURFY.

Worcester, Massachusetts.

NOTE: "Thuvia, Maid of Mars," by Edgar Rice Burroughs (ALL-STORY WEEKLY, April 8 to 22, 1916), is the fourth of the Martian series. We can supply the three numbers containing it for twenty cents each.

I enclose ten cents, for which please send me the issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for November 16. If you cannot supply this issue, please tell me where I can get it. It contained the closing chapters of "White Tigers," in which I am very much interested. I ordered this issue some time ago through a news-dealer, but he seemed unable to get it. I am not a regular subscriber to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, but buy it at bookstands. I am glad to see one of my old favorites has come back—namely, Edgar Rice Burroughs, with his "H. R. H. the Rider." I like it very much. Some time ago I ordered some magazines from you, among them the one containing the last chapters of "Everyman's Land." I received all the others, but you did not have this one in stock. I was very much disappointed, as I consider "Everyman's Land" one of the very best stories I have ever read. Now, however, I see it advertised in book form, and I assure you I shall get it before very long. Best wishes for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, IRENE O'NEILL.

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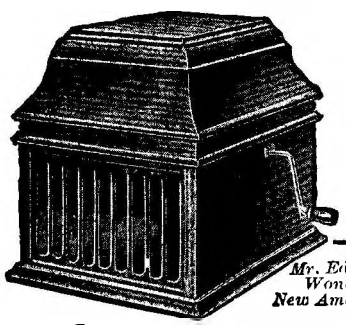

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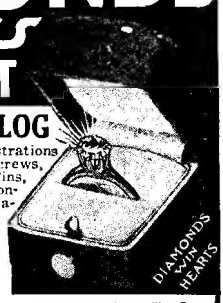

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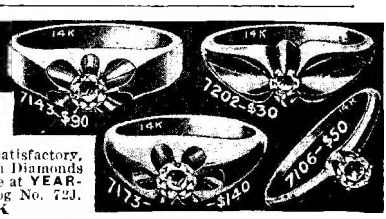

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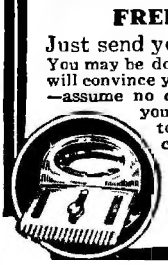

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