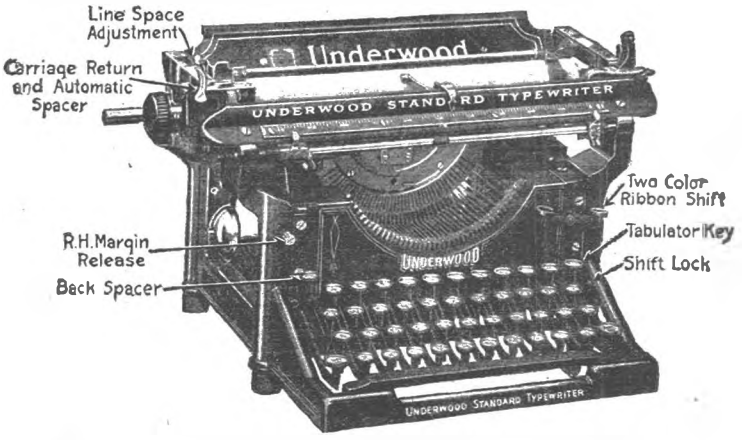
SATURDAY JANUARY 20 TEN CENTS

# ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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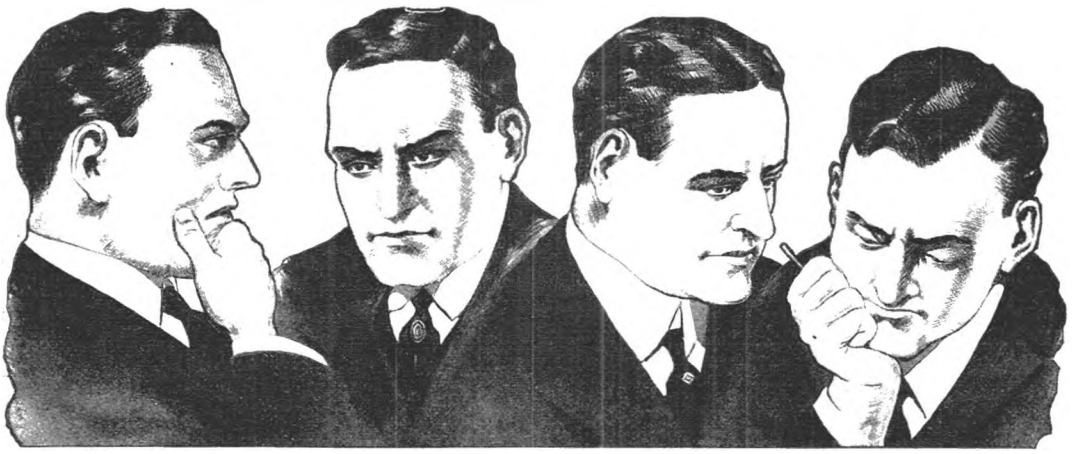

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# ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXVII — NUMBER 1


CONTENTS FOR JANUARY 20, 1917

## FOUR CONTINUED STORIES



## ONE NOVELETTE



## FIVE SHORT STORIES



## VERSE




THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 8 WEST FORTIETH STREET, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

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A 3

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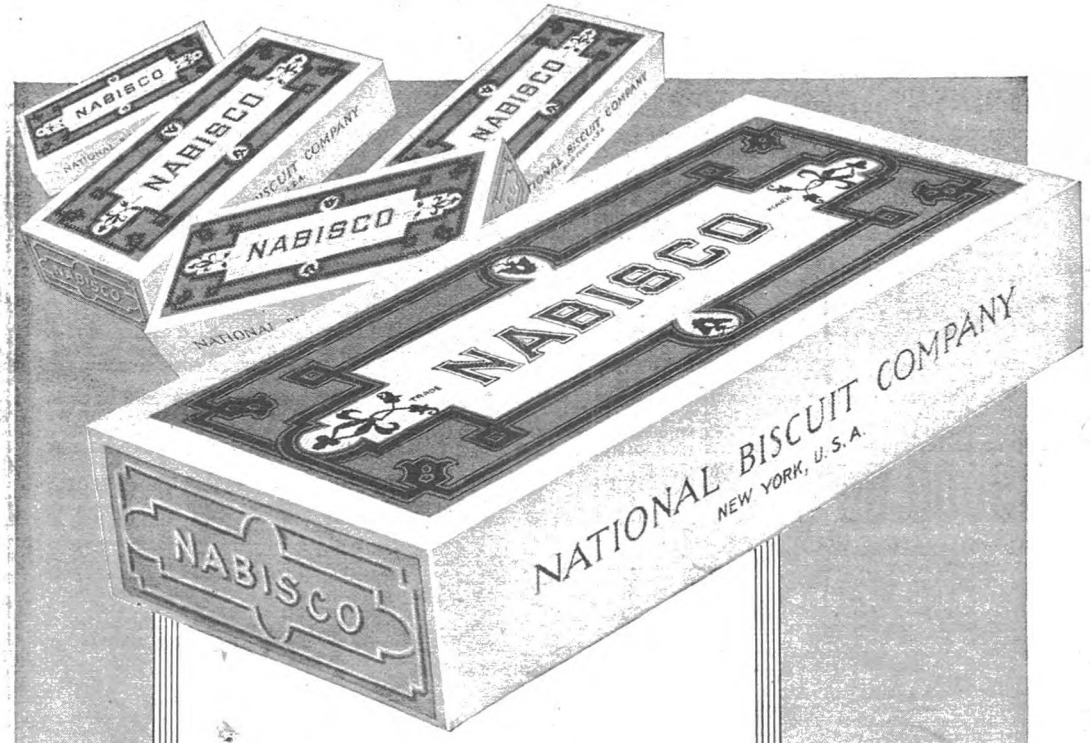


# All-popular sweets

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FESTINO—To the eye they are almonds. To the taste they are confections of the most delicious kind. A sugar-wafer shell with a creamy almond-flavored kernel.

## NATIONAL BISCUIT COMPANY

ALL-STORY WEEKLY
VOL. LXVII NUMBER 1
SATURDAY, JANUARY 20, 1917

# Opportunity

by Edgar Franklin

Author of "The Adopted Father," The *Captain Velvet* Stories, "The Ladder Jinx," etc.

IN tackling the subject of Opportunity, and of the average man's ability or inability to hear the knocking that, once at least, comes upon the door of his lethargic kingdom of things-that-are-ordinary-and-easy-to-do, Edgar Franklin has succeeded in writing one of the best laughing hits of the year. It is cleverly and unusually funny—a chuckle and a laugh and a howl of joy all the way. You'll enjoy every minute of it.—THE EDITOR.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE GREAT UNRECOGNIZED.

UP in the ring, the long-nosed person who had been announced as Kid Horrigan was having things much his own way with the smaller person billed as the Bronx Tornado.

It was the wont of Kid Horrigan to step forward lightly, to rap the Tornado smartly on the bridge of the nose, and thereafter to step back as lightly and wait until the few wild blows had fanned the air and the Tornado had returned to his meaningless and somewhat bewildered crouch.

Thereupon, in almost preoccupied fashion, the Kid stepped forward once more—and when he had done it again and again the performance began to grow monotonous and, down in Box B at the ringside, Johnson Boller yawned aloud.

The yawn finished, he leaned over wearily and addressed Anthony Fry.

"If that little wheeze had the pep of a dead mosquito," said Johnson Boller disgustedly, "he'd take that big stiff when his hands are up like that and slip him an uppercut that would freeze him solid!"

Anthony Fry's intellectual features relaxed in a faint smile.

"He's had several chances, hasn't he?" he mused.

"Several? He's had fifty! He gets three a minute and—well, look at that!"

"Yes, he missed another opportunity then, didn't he?" said Anthony. "Curious!"

Johnson Boller's cigar rolled to the

other side of his mouth and he hunched down farther in his chair.

"And nine more rounds of it to go!" he sighed.

Anthony Fry merely smiled more pensively and nodded, removing his nose-glasses and tapping his teeth reflectively—and, among other things, causing the red-faced, partially alcoholized trio behind them in Box B to wonder what he was doing at a prize-fight anyway.

As externals go, there was some ground for the wonder. Anthony Fry at forty-five was very tall, very lean in his aristocratic way, and very, very dignified, from the crown of his high-held head to the tips of his toes. In dress he was utterly beyond criticism; in feature he was thin, austere, and impressive. At first glance one might have fancied him a world-famous surgeon or the inscrutable head of the Steel Trust, but the fact of the matter was that Anthony, these fifteen years gone, had inherited Fry's Imperial Liniment, with all that that implied.

It implied a good deal in the way of income, yet even among his friends Anthony did not care to have the liniment phase of his quietly elegant existence dwelt upon too insistently. Not that he regarded the business—run by a perfect manager and rarely visited—as a secret shame exactly, but unquestionably Anthony would have preferred that his late father and his two dead uncles, when starting their original pursuit of wealth, had corralled the world's diamond supply or purchased Manhattan Island at a bargain.

Just now, perhaps, Anthony's more striking features were emphasized by the nearness of Johnson Boller, one of his few really intimate friends.

Johnson Boller's age was just about the same, but there the similarity between them stopped short.

Johnson Boller was plump, one might almost say coarse. Where Anthony walked with slow dignity, Johnson swaggered. Where Anthony spoke in a measured undertone and smiled frigidly, Johnson thumped out the words and laughed with a bark. About most things except food he was inclined to be gloomy and pessimistic, and this evening the gloom within was even thicker than usual, because Johnson Boller's wife had left him.

She was a new wife and his first—a beautiful and spirited wife, all of fifteen years younger than Johnson Boller. She was in love with him and he with her, tremendously—and now she was gone. After only six months of unalloyed happiness in the five-thousand-dollar apartment on Riverside Drive, Mrs. Johnson Boller had left for her annual visit of one month to the sister whose accursed husband owned great chunks of Montreal, Quebec, and insisted on living on one of them.

One vast hour Johnson Boller had roamed the vacuum that had been their ideal home; then he had packed his grip and gone to stay with Anthony Fry, in that utter ultimate of everything impeccable and expensive in the way of bachelor apartments, the Hotel Lasande—and even the sight of the fight tickets, when Anthony's invaluable Wilkins had returned with them, had only brought a flitting smile to Johnson Boller.

Now they were watching the second preliminary bout, and could he but have traded one thousand of these bouts for a single hour with his beloved Beatrice, Johnson Boller would gladly have—

"In the main," said Anthony Fry, "that absurd little chap up there typifies my whole conception of opportunity."

"Huh?" Johnson Boller said.

"The chance for that fatal uppercut is there—it was there a minute ago and it will be there a minute hence, and probably two minutes hence. Our Tornado hasn't seen it yet; he may go to the end of the ten rounds and never see it, and yet, unless this Horrigan chap changes his tactics, it will be repeated again and again. Would he see it if the bout ran twenty rounds?"

"How the dickens should I know?" Johnson Boller muttered.

"I'd be quite willing to wager," Anthony smiled thoughtfully, "that he *would* see it!"

Johnson Boller surveyed his friend narrowly. It was obvious that Anthony's attention had strayed from the alleged battle—and small wonder! It was equally obvious that Anthony's mind was wandering off into the abstract; and not infrequently these little journeys—providing they went not too far—were quite entertaining.

Johnson Boller, therefore, with an impulse he was to regret bitterly in the very near future, gave a prod to discussion by smiling in his own unhappy way and saying:

"What's the idea, Anthony? You're wrong, but—what is it?"

"My idea," said the proprietor of Fry's Imperial Liniment slowly, "is merely this, Johnson: that the whole proposition of the man who is a dire failure, the man who is a tremendous success, is vastly exaggerated."

"Meaning?"

"That failure does not of necessity imply incapacity or ineptitude—or success any tremendous capability, in many cases, for that matter. Taken by and large, we are all made of much the same stuff, you know. The trouble lies in the failure of the plain, average, reasonably stupid citizen to recognize opportunity's one, solitary knock!" Anthony smiled, growing himself more interested by the second. "Now, if opportunity were but decent enough to knock twice, at least double the number of striving humans would recognize her nearness and grasp her. If she could bring herself to knock three times, say, our successes would be tripled. If—"

"And if she knocked a thousand times in succession, everybody 'd be a millionaire," Johnson Boller suggested.

"Something like that," smiled Anthony. "The chap who does know opportunity, recognizes her mainly by accident, I honestly believe. Now, if we could but take each man and place opportunity before him and hold her there until he fully understood that she was present, the word failure would be omitted from the dictionaries a generation hence."

Anthony Fry winked rapidly, which in itself was rather a bad sign because it indicated that the theorizing portion of his cultured brain was growing quite rapt. At another time, very likely, Johnson Boller would have heeded the warning and turned Anthony's attention gently back to the fight; but to-night Boller sought refuge from the haunting loneliness that Beatrice had left behind.

"I don't agree with you!" he said flatly.

"Eh?"

"Nix!" said Johnson Boller. "Any guy who can come face to face with a regular honest-to-goodness opportunity, Anthony, and not know her inside of one second, could have her tied to his right leg for two hundred years and never know she was there."

"You really believe that?"

"Oh, I know it!" said Johnson Boller. "I have several millions of years of human experience to prove that I'm right."

Anthony leaned closer, causing the largest of the red-faced trio behind to growl senselessly as he was forced to shift for a view of the ring.

"Let us assume, Johnson, the individual A," said Anthony. "A wished to become a lawyer; he had his chance and missed it. We will assume him to be peculiarly stupid; we will say that he had opportunity for the second time—and again failed to grasp her. Can you think that, deliberately led up to his third opportunity of becoming a lawyer, A will turn his back for the third time?"

"Certainly," said Johnson Boller, without thought and solely because Anthony's precise driveling interested him a little more than the affair of the ring.

"Pah!" Mr. Fry said angrily.

Just here Mr. Horrigan slipped while making his —nth jab at the Tornado nose —slipped and fell upon the Tornado's fist

and thereafter reeled about for a few seconds. Johnson Boller emitted his first real laugh of the evening; Anthony Fry, who had not even seen the incident, failed even to smile.

"It would be interesting," he said crisply, "to select a subject, Johnson, and try the experiment."

"What experiment?"

"That of learning just how many times opportunity must be presented to the average individual to secure full recognition of her presence and her beauties."

"Wouldn't it?" mused Johnson Boller.

"I mean, to reach haphazard into the six millions that go to make up New York, to pick just one individual and segregate him, and then to show him—*opportunity!* To take him aside, where there was nothing else to distract him, and thrust opportunity in his very face—the opportunity, whatever it might be, that he has always desired. It seems to me, Johnson, that watching that experiment might be distinctly worth while!"

"Aha!" yawned Johnson Boller.

"So, therefore," Anthony said placidly, "we will find our subject and make the experiment."

This time, and with a considerable jar, Johnson Boller awoke to the fact that danger was at his elbow!

He sat bolt upright and stared at Anthony Fry, and in the queerest way his flesh crawled for a moment and his hands turned cold, for he knew that expression of Anthony's all too well. Intent, wholly absorbed, that expression indicated that, however ridiculous the proposition might be, its fangs had fastened in Anthony's very soul!

This was the expression which recalled—oh, so clearly—the dread time when Anthony Fry had become obsessed with the idea that crime is a matter of diet and external impression, when he had secured the two yeggmen and established them where he could watch and feed them; when, eventually, he had been forced to pay for their crowning crime or go to jail as an accomplice!

This was the expression that brought back the period in which Anthony had cherished the theory that music's true germ lay in the negro race, properly guided and separated from all outside influences and—well, this was the expression, fast enough, and Boller's throat tightened. He had not even found words of protest when Anthony pursued:

"And upon my soul! See how the thing has been prearranged for us!"

"What?"

"Look here, Johnson," the owner of Fry's Liniment hurried on, quite excitedly. "Have you noticed how packed the house is to-night?"

"What? Yes, and—"

"Every seat in the place is sold—*except this one seat in our box!*"

What of it?"

"It's fate!" chuckled Mr. Fry. "It is fate and nothing else, Johnson. Out of all the millions in New York, one man—absolutely unknown to, unsuspected by, either you or me—is coming to take this seat, doubtless for the star bout."

"But—"

"To that man," said Anthony, "I shall offer opportunity!"

"What d'ye mean? Money?" Johnson Boller asked incredulously.

"It will involve money, doubtless; I can afford a little."

"Well, you go and poke a handful of bills into a man's face and all you're going to prove is that—"

"I have no idea of doing anything of the sort," Anthony said impatiently. "What I purpose doing is simply this: I shall—"

Johnson Boller had recovered from the first shock. He drew a long, deep breath, and, leaning over to his old friend, placed a firm, strong hand on his knee and looked soothingly into his kindled eye.

"Listen, Anthony!" said he. "*Don't!*"

"Eh? You've no notion of what I mean to do," Anthony said briefly.

"No, but I can guess enough to dope it out pretty well, and—don't do it!" Johnson Boller said earnestly. "This

theory stuff is all right, Anthony; I like to sit and chatter about it as much as you do. On the level, I do! I like to talk with you about these things, and wonder what would happen if this was thus and the other thing was otherwise. But when you come to pulling it on a perfect stranger at a prize-fight, Anthony, try to remember that everybody may not understand you as well as I do."

"My dear chap!" Anthony laughed.

"Don't laugh; I know what I'm talking about," Mr. Boller went on, feverishly almost. "You wait till we get home, Anthony, and we'll talk over all this about opportunity and get it settled. For the matter of that, I can see now that you're dead right!" Johnson Boller said, and there was something almost pathetic in his voice. "You're dead right, Anthony! All you have to do is to stick opportunity before a man long enough and he's bound to chuck a hammerlock into her and slam her down to the mat for keeps! So that's settled, and we don't have to do any experimenting with human subjects. Or if you do have to have a live one to work on, wait till we get home and we'll take Wilkins, Anthony! That 'd be better, anyway."

He paused, eying his old friend with deep anxiety. Anthony Fry, having thrown back his head, laughed heartily.

"Johnson," said he, "the whole trouble with that poor old head of yours is that it is absolutely without the power of visualization! It knows the wool business; it makes thousands and thousands of dollars out of the wool business; but to save its very life it cannot reach out into the abstract!"

"It doesn't want to reach into the abstract!"

"Well, it should, because it will grow more and more stodgy if it doesn't," Mr. Fry said complacently. "Good gracious, Johnson! Come to life! Just consider what may be coming to this seat!"

"I don't dare!" Johnson Boller said honestly.

"An old man, perhaps—one who fancies his opportunities all past and done for. What more vitally interesting than thrusting opportunity upon such a man?"

"So far as I'm concerned, anything under the sun and—"

"Or perhaps a middle-aged failure," Anthony rambled on. "A man just past the age when hope is richest—a man who has seen his chances come and go. I don't know, Johnson, but I rather believe that I'm hoping for a middle-aged man."

"Yes, one that's weak enough to gag before he can yell for the police," Johnson Boller grunted. "Now, Anthony, before you—"

"Or best of all, perhaps, an average young man," smiled the experimenter. "That would really be the most interesting sort of subject, Johnson—just a plain chap, not fully matured, not soured by disappointment nor rendered too sophisticated by contact with the world. On the whole, I really hope that a young man is coming!"

And now, for a time, Johnson Boller said nothing at all. There was always the chance that Anthony might work it out of his system in talk—there was the other chance, growing rosier and rosier by the minute, that the odd chair had not been sold at all.

It was rather queer, when one considered that seats for this particular star bout had been at a premium for a week, but it was nevertheless the fact that the preliminary arguments were over and the announcer spinning his megaphoned tale for the big battle, and the seat still unoccupied. To Johnson Boller it even hinted at the existence of a special Providence designed to watch the doings of such as Anthony Fry.

The minutes were wearing along, too. The cheering was done with and the megaphone had left the ring. Seconds and trainers were climbing down through the ropes, and the principals were listening boredly to the final words of instruction. And now the gong had struck and they were at it—and still the odd chair in Box B remained unoccupied.

"Opportunity!" mused Anthony Fry. "The Great Unrecognized!"

"Eh?"

"The Great Unrecognized," Anthony repeated complacently. "Not a bad term for her, eh?"

Johnson Boller made a last survey of the neighborhood, permitted himself a sigh of relief, and grinned broadly at his old friend.

"Great term, Anthony!" he agreed genially. "He isn't coming!"

"He'll be here yet," Anthony smiled.

"Not now," Boller chuckled. "No man gives up ten or fifteen dollars for one of these seats and then stays away for any reason save death. Your victim was hit by a motor-truck on the way here—and at that he may be getting off easier than if you'd caught him and tried some psychological experiments on him."

And here Mr. Boller stretched and removed his cigar, so that his grin might spread from ear to ear.

"It only goes to show you, Anthony, that there's some power watching over people like you and governing their affairs, that is past our understanding. Now, if that poor unknown devil had ever turned up and—"

He stopped short.

In Anthony Fry's eye the blue-white fire of enthusiasm glinted out suddenly. Half rising, Mr. Fry gazed down the vast place, and then, with a smile, sat back again and eyed his friend.

"Something's wrong with your power, Johnson," said he. "Here he comes now!"

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## CHAPTER II.

### THEORY'S VICTIM.

JOHNSON BOLLER looked. And, looking, the pleased grin which had so lately suffused his features faded out swiftly—because the unknown really seemed to be with them.

Far down the mob, an attendant of the place was indicating their general direction to a shortish man in a long storm-coat; and now he of the coat had nodded and was pushing his way down the narrow aisle toward them, staring at the sea of faces as he moved along slowly and seeming a little uncertain in his movements.

"Anthony!" Johnson Boller said.

"Well?"

"Don't speak to this guy! I don't like his looks!"

"Bah!"

"And this gang behind us is doing everything but watch the fight," Mr. Boller whispered on. "If you try anything funny on this fellow that's coming, he's likely to put up a yell of some kind—and once a fight starts in this box these three behind are coming in."

"Johnson, don't be absurd," Anthony smiled. "Get over in the odd seat; I want the chap next to me so that I can have a good look at him."

"Will you remember that I said you were going to start trouble?" Johnson inquired hotly.

"I'll remember anything you like, only get over into that odd seat," Mr. Fry muttered, as the stranger came closer. "Ah, he's hardly more than a boy."

"Yes, he's a young thug!" Johnson Boller informed him in parting. "He's a young gang-leader, Anthony—look at the walk! Look at the way he has that cap pulled down over one eye! Look at—"

Anthony Fry, obviously, would have heard him as well had he been seated on the steps of Colorado's State capitol. Intellectual countenance alight, the mildly eccentric Anthony—really the sanest and most delightful of men except when these abstract notions came to him—was wholly absorbed in the newcomer.

Rather than stare directly he turned toward the ring as the young man in the long coat crowded into the box and settled down with a little puff, but one who knew him as well as Johnson Boller could feel Anthony's eyes looking past his lean right cheek and taking in every detail of theory's prospective victim.

Not that he was a particularly savage-looking creature on closer inspection, however. The cheap cloth cap and the shabby long coat—heavy enough for a typhoon when there was the merest suggestion of drizzle outdoors — gave one that impression at first, but second examination showed him to be really rather mild.

He seemd to be about twenty. His clothing, from the overcoat to the trousers and the well-worn shoes, indicated that he came from no very elevated plane of society. His features, which seemed decidedly boyish among some of the faces present, were decidedly good. His hair needed cutting and had needed it for some time, and he was tremendously interested in the star bout. Elbows on the rail, cap pulled down to shade his eyes, the youngster's whole excited soul seemed to be centered in the ring.

So at a rather easy guess Mr. Boller concluded that he was a mechanic or a janitor's assistant or an elevator boy or something like that. The buyer of his seat, finding himself unable to come at the last moment, had given the kid his ticket and he was having the time of his life.

Johnson Boller hunched down again with a sad little grunt. He had meant to enjoy this star bout; only a week ago, in fact, before the Montreal horror loomed up, he had been considering just how an evening might be snatched from the happy home life without disturbing Beatrice — who, ignorant of modern pugilism, disapproved prize-fighting on the ground of brutality. And now it was ruined, because Johnson Boller's next half hour would have to go to the devising of means by which Anthony could be steered from his idiotic experiment, whatever it might be in concrete form.

Anthony meant to offer this youngster opportunity — how or in what form Anthony himself doubtless did not know as yet. But he did intend to speak to him and, unless Johnson Boller's faculty for guessing was much in error, he meant to lead the youngster hence, perhaps to feed him in a restaurant while he talked him full of abstract theory, perhaps even to take him home to the Lasande.

But whatever he intended, it wouldn't do. Johnson Boller really needed Anthony this night. He needed Anthony to listen while he talked about the absent Beatrice, and recalled all her beauty, all her fire, all her adorable qualities; he needed Anthony at the other side of the chess board, over which game Johnson Boller could grow so profoundly sleepy that even Beatrice *en route* to Siam could hardly have disturbed him. And he needed no third person!

Toward the end of the fifth round, however, Johnson Boller grew painfully conscious that he had as yet concocted no very promising scheme. Indeed, the lone inspiration so far included whispering to the kid that the gentleman on his other side was mildly insane and that flight were best, should he gentleman address him; but Anthony persisted in leaning so close to the youngster that whispering was impossible.

Also, it occurred to Johnson Boller that he himself might be taken violently ill—that he might clutch his heart and beg Anthony to lead him to the outer air. There was little in that, though; the chances were more than even that Anthony, if his enthusiasm as to the victim still persisted, would request the youngster's assistance in getting him out.

And the enthusiasm seemed enduring enough. They were in the tenth and last round now and Anthony, with his strange smile, was turning to the young man and—ah, yes, he was speaking:

"Pardon me!"

The boy started with undue violence and stared at him, drew back and looked Anthony up and down as he said:

"Speaking to me?"

"I am speaking to you, young man," Anthony smiled benignly. "May I speak to you a little more?"

This, very evidently, was a sensitive boy, unaccustomed to chatting with really elegant, palpably prosperous strangers. The startled eyes ran over Anthony again and a frown came into them.

"What's the idea?" he asked briefly.

"There is a very large idea, which I should like to make clear to you," Mr. Fry went on smoothly. "I should like to have a talk with you, young man—not here, of course, but when the fight is over—and it will be to your considerable advantage—"

"I don't want to buy anything," the canny young man informed him.

"And I don't want to sell you anything," Anthony laughed, "but I do wish to present to you a proposition which will be of much interest."

This time, possibly not without warrant, the boy shrank unmistakably from him, hitching his collar a little higher and his cap a little farther down.

"It wouldn't interest me," he said with some finality. "I'm—just a poor lad, you know, and I haven't a cent to invest in anything."

"But you have an hour to invest, perhaps?" Anthony smiled.

"Nope!"

"Oh, yes, you have," the owner of Fry's Imperial Liniment persisted. "It is for no purpose of my own, save perhaps to justify a small contention, but I wish you to come home with me for a little while."

"*What?*" said the boy.

As Johnson Boller observed, sighing heavily and shaking his head as he observed it, the young man was downright scared now. An older citizen would have spoken his candid thoughts to Anthony Fry, doubtless, and chilled him back to reason; but this one drew away from Anthony until he bumped into Johnson Boller, turned hastily and asked the latter's pardon and then gazed at Anthony with eyes which, if not filled with terror, certainly held a quantity of somewhat amused apprehension.

He shook his head determinedly and seemed to be seeking words, and as he sought them a new element entered the situation. The red-faced person just behind Anthony Fry, having gazed soddenly from the youngster to the maker of theories, lurched forward suddenly and spoke:

"Let that kid alone!"

"Eh?" Anthony said amazedly.

Johnson Boller leaned forward quickly.

"Stop right there, Anthony!" he hissed. "Don't answer him!"

"Why on earth shouldn't I answer him?" Anthony snapped.

"You keep out of it, young feller!" the red-faced one told Johnson Boller, and one saw that his honest rage was rising fast. "He's gotter let that kid alone!"

"Well, confound your impudence, sir!" Anthony began. "I—"

"None o' that stuff!" the total stranger said hotly. "You cut out picking on the kid or I'll step on your face."

And here his redder-faced companion leaned forward and demanded thickly:

"Woddy do ter kid, Joe? Huh? Wozzer matter—huh? Wozzer trouble 'th you—huh?"

Johnson Boller was on his feet and in the aisle, perturbed and still able to see how the unexpected had been planned for his especial benefit.

"This is where we get off, Anthony," he said briefly, "I could smell it coming. Come along."

"Is there going to be a fight here?" the boy in the chair between asked, with a quantity of eager excitement.

"If I know the signs, ten seconds hence this spot is going to look like a detail of the Battle of the Marne," said Mr. Boller. "And you want to get out of it quick or you'll be hurt, kid. You scoot right down that way, the way you came, and get clear of the crowd before it starts."

He pointed. He waited. But the boy did not start.

Who, in the calmer afterward, shall

explain just how these gunpowder situations develop, grow instantaneously incandescent, and explode?

The atmosphere was one of physical battle; the red-faced gentlemen were filled with alcoholic spirits; yet who shall say just why the red-faced man, his friend stumbling against him, gained the impression that Anthony Fry had struck him a coward's blow from behind? Or why, with a roar of incoherent fury, he aimed a dreadful punch at Anthony himself, standing there quite collected if somewhat paler?

That is what happened, although by no means all that happened. The unfortunate spot came three seconds later when Anthony, side-stepping the alcoholized jab, threw up his hands to fend off the jabber's whole swaying person — threw them, all unwittingly, so that his right fist settled squarely on a red nose, drawing therefrom a magic spurt of blood!

After that, for a little, nothing was very clear. Three sets of fists began to hammer in Anthony's general direction; three throats shouted — and three hundred took up the shout.

Men came tumbling toward Box B and into it. A large person in bright-blue shirt-sleeves, with a derby on the back of his head, received the third blow intended for Anthony and returned it with interest, just as that startled person was jammed against the rail.

From three different points, high-held nightsticks were pushing through the surging crowd; and Johnson Boller, looking quickly at the storm center, counted no less than eleven separate couples pounding one another, and smiled as he jerked Anthony bodily over the rail and hissed:

"Come on, you poor lunatic! Come on!"

"Johnson, upon my soul—" Anthony began.

"Never mind your soul! Get your body out of here before the cops find it and club it to death for starting this rumpus!" Mr. Boller cried agitatedly. "Look at that sergeant, Anthony! He's got his eye on you and he's fighting his way over here! Now, you scoot down there, kid! Move! Quick, before—"

"No! Come with us, boy!" Anthony said, somewhat disconcertingly.

"What for?" the boy inquired. "I want to watch this."

"You stay and watch it by all means!" Johnson Boller smiled quickly. "You're perfectly safe, youngster; I was only fooling. Now you come this way, Anthony, and—"

Anthony, unperturbed, laid a kindly hand on the youngster's shoulder.

"You'd better come with us, my son," said he. "They'll run you in for a witness and you may be locked up for a week unless you have friends to get you out."

This time he had startled the young man. Wide eyes turned and stared at him and there was a distinct note of fright in the voice that said:

"What do you mean? Arrest me?"

"Of course, if you stay here," Anthony said. "Come with me and I'll take care of you."

And then Johnson Boller had caught his arm and was dragging him away; and Anthony, catching the willing arm of the boy, was dragging him after. Around the side of the ring they sped, where an interested group of fighters and trainers watched the mêlée; and, veering, on through a small side door and into the night.

"Here's where the taxis wait," Mr. Boller said quickly. "Now, you beat it straight down the street, kid, and—"

"We'll take this one," Anthony interrupted, as he jerked open the door and thrust his bewildered charge inward. "Tell the man to take us home, Johnson."

Johnson Boller complied with a grunt, slamming the door viciously as he plumped into his own seat. The kid, prospective victim of Anthony's latest notion, was still with them — and he

seemed contented enough to be there for the present. That possibility of arrest had jarred the youngster more than a little, and he hunched down on the little forward seat and breathed quite heavily. And now Anthony's deep, kindly voice was addressing him with—

"You'll come home with me for a little while, youngster?"

Mr. Boller drew a long, resigned breath and prepared to back the boy in every objection his doubtless normal mind should offer—but they chanced to pause by an arc lamp just then and he caught the boy's expression.

It was really a queer thing to see. No fear was there at all now, but only the overwhelming innocent curiosity of youth, mingled with an inscrutable something else. One might have called it a daredevil light, breathing the young craving for adventure, but Johnson Boller, with an unaccountable shudder, felt that it was not just that.

To save him, he could not have named the quality; he sensed it rather than actually saw it, but it was there just the same — an ominous, mocking, speculative amusement that had no place at all in the eye of an elevator boy when looking at the wealthy, dignified Anthony Fry. The boy's fine teeth showed for a moment as he asked:

"Pardon me, but what's it all about? Why under the sun should I go home with you?"

"Because I want to talk confidentially to you for an hour."

"You're not judging from these togs that I'm a criminal, are you?" the boy grinned, and to Johnson Boller the tone was far too cultivated for the clothes.

"What?"

"I mean, you don't want any one murdered, or anything of that kind?"

Anthony laughed richly.

"By no means, my dear boy. As to what it is all about I'll tell you when we get there. You'll come?"

"I think not," the boy said frankly.

"But—"

"Nix! I don't know why, but I don't like the idea. I think it's a little bit too unusual. Who are you, anyway?"

"My name is Fry, if that tells you anything," smiled its owner.

"Fry?" the boy repeated.

"Anthony Fry."

"Eh?" the youngster said, and there was a peculiarly sharp note in his voice.

"He makes Fry's Liniment," Johnson Boller put in disgustedly, yet happily withal because it was plain that the boy would have no part in spoiling his chess game and the little chat about Beatrice. "He has a lot of theories not connected with the liniment business, kid, and he wants to bore you to death with some of them. They wouldn't interest you any more than they interest me, and you're right in refusing to listen to them."

"Umum," said the boy oddly.

"And now I'll tell you what we'll do," Johnson Boller concluded quite happily. "You tell me where you live, and when the man drops us I'll pay your fare home. Some class to that, eh? Going home in a taxicab after sitting in a ten dollar seat at a big fight! You don't get off on a jamboree like that very often, I'll bet!"

"No," the boy said thoughtfully.

"So here's the little old Hotel Lasande where Mr. Fry lives," Mr. Boller finished cheerfully, "and where shall I tell the man to set you down, kid?"

He had settled the matter, of course. Never in this world could the little ragamuffin resist the temptation of returning to his tenement home, or whatever it was, in a taxi. Johnson Boller, rising as the vehicle stopped, laid a kindly hand on his shoulder.

"Now, you sit over in my seat and stretch your legs while you ride, kid—and here! Have a real cigar and feel like a real sport! Don't you know how to bite off the end?"

"I—don't want to bite off the end yet," the boy muttered.

"Sink your teeth in it. Now I'll get you a match."

He felt for one, did Johnson Boller, and then ceased feeling for one. That sudden low laugh of the young man's was one of the oddest sounds he had ever heard; moreover, as the Lasande doorman opened the door of the taxi, he caught the same odd light in the boy's eye — and now he, too, had risen and pulled the disreputable cap a little lower as he said:

"I won't smoke it now, thanks. I'm going up-stairs and listen to Mr. Fry for a while, I think."

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## CHAPTER III.

### OPPORTUNITY.

THE Hotel Lasande deserves a word or two.

In the strict sense it is no hotel at all, being merely a twenty-story pile of four and five — and even seven and eight—room bachelor suites of the very highest class. Moving into the Lasande and assuming one of its breath-stopping leases is a process not unlike breaking into the most exclusive sort of club. One is investigated, which tells it all. The Lasande, catering to the very best and most opulent of the bachelor class, has nothing else beneath its roof.

Silent men servants, functionating perfectly despite their apparent woodenness, flit everywhere, invisible until needed, disappearing instantly when the task of the moment is done. There are dining-rooms for the few who do not dine in the privacy of their own apartments, and there is a long, comfortable lobby where, under the eagle eye of the clerk in the corner, only tenants or guests of tenants may lounge.

Into this latter area came Anthony Fry and Johnson Boller and the boy, and as the peculiarly intelligent eyes of the latter darted about it seemed to Mr. Boller that their twinkle turned to a positive glitter.

It was absurd enough, it hailed doubtless from the nervous loneliness within himself, yet Johnson Boller felt that the youngster was a downright evil force, swaggering along there, tremendously conscious of his own importance! He should have been sedate and subdued, to put it mildly, yet he grinned at the impeccable night clerk from under his cap and sent his impudent eyes roving on, to alight finally on the big chair near the north elevator.

"Who's the party with the big specs and why the prolonged stare?" the youngster asked irreverently.

"Eh? Oh, that's Mr. Hitchin, a neighbor of mine," Anthony smiled.

"He's an amateur detective, kid," Johnson Boller added significantly. "He knows every young crook in town. He's coming here to give you the once over."

"I should worry," murmured the self-possessed young man.

"Johnson, don't be idiotic," Anthony said, as he laid a hand on the boy's arm. "I'll have to introduce you. What's your name, my lad?"

"Eh?" asked the unusual boy, staring hard at Anthony.

"Your name! What is it?"

"Well—er—Prentiss," the youth admitted.

"Is that your first name or your last name?"

"That's just my last name," the boy smiled. "First name's David."

"David Prentiss, eh?" Anthony murmured with some satisfaction, for it had a substantial sound. "Well, David—er, Hitchin, how are you? Mr. Hitchin, my young friend, Mr. David Prentiss."

The boy's hand went out and gripped Hitchin's heartily enough. Mr. Hitchin held it for a moment and peered at David—and one saw what a really penetrating stare he owned.

It bored, as a point of tempered ice, wordlessly accusing one of murder, counterfeiting, bank burglary and plain second-story work. Frequently deep students of the higher detective fiction grow this stare, and Hobart Hitchin was one of

the deepest. But now, having pierced David in a dozen places without finding bomb or knife, the stare turned to Anthony and grew quite normal and amiable.

"Prentiss, eh?" said Hitchin. "Not the Vermont branch?"

"New York," David supplied.

"Mr. Prentiss is staying with me for a little," Anthony smiled as they moved toward the elevator again.

"Staying with you, eh?" Hitchin repeated, with a careful survey of David's well-worn storm coat; and added, with characteristic bluntness: "Working for you, Fry?"

"My guest," Anthony said annoyedly; and then the car came down and the door opened and they left Mr. Hitchin, but the boy cocked an eye at Anthony and asked flatly:

"What was the idea of that—staying with you? I'm not staying with you."

"You may decide to stay for a little."

"Not me," said David.

"We shall see," Anthony chuckled. "This is our floor."

Wilkins—the priceless, faultless Wilkins who had been with Anthony for sixteen years—opened the door and, even though he were Wilkins, started a trifle at the sight of David and his cap. He flushed for the start, to be sure, as his master moved into the big living-room with his superb dignity, but when he had taken cap and coat and examined the suit beneath, Wilkins shook his head mentally. One shock had come that evening in the knowledge that Johnson Boller, whom Wilkins did not approve, was to be with them, but this young ruffian!

"Make yourself at home, David," Anthony smiled. "We'll shed our coats and find our smoking jackets."

Johnson Boller with him, he moved to the corner bedroom, to face his old friend with:

"Well, what do you think of him?"

"He's a bad egg," Johnson Boller said readily. "I don't like his eye and the way he swaggers would get him six months in any court in town. Say whatever it is the devilish impulse prompts you to say and then fire him before he pinches the silver."

"Bosh!" Anthony said testily. "The boy's awed and self-conscious—the swagger is assumed to cover that, of course. I mean, what in your decidedly inferior judgment, is his fitness as a subject for experiment? Will he know opportunity when she is first set before him or will it be necessary to present her repeatedly?"

Johnson Boller laughed harshly and stared hard at his old friend. Under certain conditions, the empty apartment on Riverside Drive might not be so bad.

"Say!" he demanded. "Are you going to keep that little rat here and argue with him till he admits that he recognizes whatever opportunity you're going to thrust at him?"

"Essentially that."

"Well, if it's an opportunity to earn an honest living, he'll never see it—and if the chatter takes more than an hour I'm going home!" Johnson Boller snapped. "I'd have stayed there if I'd known you were going off into the abstract, Anthony. I wanted to talk to you and have a little game of chess and a bottle of ale and—"

Anthony smiled serenely.

"And the mere fact that a train of thought, only slightly unusual, has entered your evening, has upset your whole being, hasn't it? Well, it 'll do you good to hear and watch something different. This boy will see opportunity before I'm done with him, Johnson, and the longer it takes the sounder my general hypothesis will have been proven."

Curiously enough, David had lost much of his grinning assurance when they rejoined him. The impudence had left his eye and the boy seemed downright uneasy. He started and rose at the sight of them, and his quick, nervous smile lingered only a moment as he said:

"I think I'd better be going after all, Mr. Fry. It's pretty late and—"

"Just a minute or two, and perhaps you'll change your mind," Anthony said quietly as he dropped into his pet chair. "You'll permit a personal question or two, David?"

"I suppose so."

"Then—how old are you?"

"Twenty."

"Ah! Parents living?"

David nodded.

"And in rather humble circumstances, perhaps?"

This time David glanced at him keenly, queerly, for an instant — opened his lips and shut them again and ended with a mere jerk of a nod.

"How about schooling, David? You've been through high school?"

"Er—yes."

"And have you a profession?" Anthony pursued.

"No, I haven't any profession," the boy muttered.

"But you're working, of course?" Mr. Fry asked sharply.

"What? Oh, yes," said David.

"At some mechanical line?"

"Oh, yes," David said.

"In just what line, then?"

And now, had Anthony but been watching, some of Johnson Boller's suspicions must have seemed justified. There was no question about the way David's very intelligent eyes were acting now; they darted furtively, wildly almost, from side to side, as if the boy were seeking escape. They darted toward Anthony and away from him and back to David's shabby suit and worn shoes.

"I'm a—a plumber's helper!" the boy said gustily.

"Wait a second, kid!" Mr. Boller put in. "Let me see those hands!"

"Well, they—they haven't had time to get roughened up yet!" David said quickly. "I just went to work yesterday."

"The boy's lying, Anthony!" Mr. Boller said bluntly.

"I don't lie, Mr.—"

"Boller," Anthony supplied. "And please don't badger the boy, Johnson."

"I'm not badgering him," said Johnson Boller; "only that kid's hands look more like a society queen's than an honest workingman's."

"They may be hands designed for better things. David! Tell me, are you quite satisfied to be a plumber's helper, or was it the only thing you could find in the way of employment?"

"It was all I could find," David muttered, glancing at the door. And then, with his quick smile, he rose again. "I'd like to sit here and answer questions, Mr. Fry, but I'll have to run along and—"

Anthony beamed at him over his glasses, fidgetting there with the impatience of youth, standing on one foot and then on the other. Anthony turned and beamed at the bookcase beside him, and selecting a volume, beamed at that, too.

"David," said he, "will you be seated long enough to hear a little poem?"

"What?"

"It is a very short poem, and one of my favorites," Anthony mused, and his stare at David grew quite hypnotic. "Ah, here it is—a little, wonderfully big poem by the late Senator John Ingalls. It is called—'Opportunity.'"

"Aha!" David said rather stupidly.

"And now, listen," said Anthony, clearing his throat.

"Master of human destinies am I!"

He paused and sent the hypnotic smile drilling into David.

"'*Master of human destinies!*'" he repeated. "That, in itself, means a very great deal, does it not?"

"I guess so," David muttered dazedly, and, however briefly, Johnson Boller almost liked him for the look he directed at Anthony's bowed head.

"Fame, love, and fortune on my footsteps wait,
Cities and fields I walk; I penetrate
Deserts and seas remote, and passing by
Hovel and mart and palace, soon or late
I knock unbidden once at every gate!

"Once," concluded Anthony, "at every gate. *Once*, David!"

"Yes, I've heard that poem before," said David, who was examining the rug.

Johnson Boller laughed in a rich undertone. Anthony flushed, and his voice rose a little as he continued:

"If feasting, rise; if sleeping, wake before
I turn away. It is the hour of fate
And they who follow me reach every state
Mortals desire, and conquer every foe
Save death . . ."

The owner of Fry's Imperial Liniment looked over his glasses and discovered that David, having poked open the door of the little-used cellaret with his foot, was looking in at the bottles with mild interest.

"'Every foe save death!'" Anthony rapped out. "Did you hear that, David?"

"Yes, of course," David said hastily. "Do you know what time it is, Mr. Fry?"

"No! Hear the rest!" said Anthony.

". . . But those who doubt or hesitate,
Condemned to failure, penury, or woe,
Seek me in vain and ceaselessly implore;
I answer not and I return—no more!"

Almost reverently the book closed.

"Have you quite assimilated the full meaning of that little poem, David?" he asked gravely.

"Er—yes."

"Quite?" Anthony persisted.

"Why, I guess so," David said, eyes opening again. "Yes, I know I have—only don't look at me like that and—"

"Then hear the rest of what I have to say," Anthony went on quickly and impressively, "for now we come to my reason for bringing you here. David, you are poor. You are without a profession—without a business of your own. Your brightest hope at present is to become a plumber."

"Say—" David began.

"I should have said, your brightest chance," Anthony corrected. "But your *ambition*, David, is altogether different. Your ambition is to become—*what?*"

And now, before the penetrating, hypnotic eye, David seemed, not without warrant, to have grown downright frightened. He glanced swiftly at Anthony and at the door.

"I don't know," he said breathlessly. "What's the answer?"

"Well, what do you want to become? A doctor? A lawyer? A teacher? An electrician? A journalist? A clergyman? A painter? An architect? A mining engineer? A civil engineer? A—"

It was plain to Johnson Boller that the situation was getting beyond David's doubtless nimble, doubtless criminal, mind. The boy held up an unsteady hand and stayed the flow.

"That's it!" he said hoarsely. "A civil engineer! You got it out of me, didn't you? And now I'd better go and—"

His quick, scared grin showed all his teeth, and he nodded in the most ridiculous fashion—really much in the fashion one might nod at a hopeless lunatic when agreeing that, as a matter of course, he is the original Pharaoh. His mental state fairly glowed from him; all that David wanted was to leave the Hotel Lasande.

David, in short, was doing just what ninety-nine per cent of the human race insists on doing; even at the hint of opportunity, he was trying to face about and escape. But more than that, David, obviously one of the lower classes, was treating Anthony Fry with a tolerance that was more than mere disrespect. He was causing Johnson Boller to chuckle wearily over his cigar—and in spite of his purely abstract interest, Anthony's color grew darker and his voice decidedly sharper.

"Sit still," he commanded, "and listen to me. David, up to this evening you had no real hope of attaining your ambition. In fine, opportunity to make the goal was not yours. Now opportunity *is* yours!"

"Is it?" David said throatily, albeit he did not resume his seat.

"Because this is what I mean to do for

you, David; I mean to take you out of your present humble situation and educate you. I mean to have you here to live with me."

"*What?*" David gasped.

"From this very evening!" Anthony said firmly, and also astonishingly. "I shall outfit you properly and supply you with what money you need. I shall have you prepared for the best engineering college we can find, and entered there for the most complete engineering course. If you are helping in the support of your family, I shall pay to them a sum equivalent to your wages each month—or perhaps a little more, if it be essential to removing all anxiety from your mind. You follow me."

David merely clutched the edge of his coat and gulped, staring fascinatedly at Anthony.

"I am reasonably wealthy, and I shall bear every expense that you may incur, David. When you have graduated, and everything that can be taught you has been taught you, I shall establish you in proper offices and use my considerable personal influence to see that you are supplied with work, and again until you are self-supporting I shall bear all the expense. In short, David," Anthony concluded, "I am holding *opportunity* before you — opportunity to do, without trouble or worry or delay, the thing you most desire. Well?"

Even Johnson Boller was mildly interested, although only mildly, and with a deprecatory smile on his lips. He knew exactly what the boy would do, of course, but it had no connection with Anthony's crack-brained notion.

David would grab with both hands at this kind of opportunity and settle down to a life of ease, and the chances were that he'd get Anthony to sign something that would cost him thousands when he had waked up and lost interest in the opportunity proposition.

To Johnson's sleepy and suspicious eye David looked like a crafty little devil, if one ever walked.

Yet after a silent thirty seconds opportunity, in her gaudiest and most conspicuous form, had made no visible impression on David Prentiss. His bewildered eyes roved from Anthony to Johnson Boller. Once he seemed about to laugh; again he seemed about to speak; he did neither.

And the clock struck twelve.

And had a bomb exploded between his poorly shod feet, the effect on David Prentiss could hardly have been more striking. He started, and his eyes, dilating, lost their bewilderment and showed plain, overwhelming horror. His mouth opened with a shout of:

"Was that midnight?"

"Very likely," Anthony said impatiently. "But as to—"

"Where's my cap and coat?" David demanded.

"Never mind your cap and coat. I—"

"But I do mind 'em!" David cried. "I've got to have them—quick! Where are they? Where's the man who took them?"

Anthony merely smiled with waxing curiosity.

"So you are really rejecting opportunity at the first knock, eh?" he mused.

And now David stilled his rising excitement only with a huge effort. He gripped his chair and looked Anthony in the eye.

"Opportunity be — hanged!" he cried shrilly. "Give me my cap and coat! I want to go home!"

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE RELUCTANT ONE.

ONE knew Anthony Fry for two or three decades before quite understanding him. David's great disadvantage, of course, was that he had met Anthony only an hour or so before. To David, doubtless, the quiet, mysterious, speculative smile seemed sinister, for he repeated thickly:

"I want my — my cap and my coat and—"

"Well, what are you going to do if you don't get them?" Anthony laughed.

"What did you say?" David asked quickly.

"What if you don't get your coat?"

"Does that mean that you're going to keep me here, whether I want to stay or not?" the boy asked quickly.

"Not just that, perhaps, but it does mean that I'm going to keep you here for a little while, David, until you've come to your senses and—"

"I'll yell!" David stated.

"Eh?"

"If you try to keep me here I'll yell until everybody in the house comes in to see what's happening!"

Anthony laughed quietly.

"Don't be ridiculous, David," he said. "I've lived here for years, and they will know perfectly well that I'm not injuring you in any way."

"Oh!" gasped David.

"So just sit down again and consider what I have offered you. Sit still for just one minute and consider—and then give me your answer."

Finger-tips drumming, benevolent gaze beaming over his glasses, the unusual Anthony waited. David's scared eyes roved the room, wandered over Johnson Boller, reading his paper, and finally settled so steadily on that gentleman that he looked up and, looking, read David's mind and shrugged his shoulders.

"Your own fault, kid," said he. "I wanted to give you a free ride, but you had to come up and hear what he had to say."

"Johnson!" Anthony said sharply. "Just let the youngster's mental processes work the thing out in their own way."

Half a minute dragged along—yet before it was gone one saw clearly that the mental processes had taken their grip. An extremely visible change was coming over David Prentiss. He gulped down certain emotions of his own, and presently managed to smile, uneasily at first and then with a certain confidence. He cleared his throat and, with a slight huskiness, addressed Anthony:

"Er—do I understand that you want me to stay here until I fully appreciate all you've offered me, Mr. Fry?"

"Virtually that."

"Well, I appreciated that all along; but—but I was sort of worried about it getting so late, you know," David said brightly. "I certainly do appreciate it, and I thank you very much. Now can I have my coat?"

"Really decided to grip the opportunity, eh?" Anthony asked keenly.

"You bet!"

Johnson Boller laid aside his paper.

"Now chase him, Anthony!" he said. "He's standing up and holding the sugar on his nose. Slip the kid a five-dollar bill and let Wilkins—"

"Do you really imagine that I'd rouse all the boy's hopes and then play him a shabby trick like that?" Anthony asked sharply.

"Huh?"

"Most emphatically not!" Mr. Fry said. "I'll play no such shabby trick on the youngster. He shall have exactly the chance I promised, and I shall watch the working out of the idea with the most intense interest. David, I'm going to keep you here from this minute!"

"Keep me here?" David echoed blankly.

"Certainly."

David gazed fixedly at the electrolier.

"Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Fry," he said. "I'd like to stay to-night, but I can't—not to-night. You see, I have to go home to my father. He's an—an invalid."

"We'll telephone the good news to him," Anthony smiled.

"You can't," said David. "We're too poor to have a telephone."

"Very well. Then we'll wire him."

David shook his head energetically.

"That wouldn't do, either," said he. "Father's sick, you know. His heart's very weak. Just the sight of a telegram might kill him."

"Unfortunate!" Anthony sighed and shrugged his shoulders. "Very well, David. Then you shall write him a note, and I'll have Wilkins take it to him."

David swallowed audibly and smiled a wild little smile.

"Oh, no! Not that, sir!" said he. "That might be even worse than a telegram, I think."

"Why?"

"Well, father would be likely to think that I'd been — been injured and taken into some swell home, you know, and that I was writing like that just to reassure him. No," David said firmly. "That would be the worst possible thing. I'll have to go myself and talk it over with father and—now if I can have my cap and my coat?"

It came as a familiar refrain. It caused Anthony's eye to darken suddenly as he sat back and stared at the boy.

"Confound your hat and coat!" he rapped out. "See here, David. You write the note, and I myself will take it to your father and explain—and be sure that he will rejoice. There is the desk. Where do you live?"

His tone was not nearly so benevolent. Opposition, as always, was rousing Anthony's unfortunate stubbornness; with or without reason, had David but known it, every mention of that cap and coat was diminishing his chances of walking out of the Lasande — and it is possible that he sensed something of the kind, for his smile disappeared abruptly, and the assurance that had been with him was no more.

"I can't tell you where I live!" he said hoarsely.

"In the name of heaven, why not?" Anthony snapped.

"Because — because — well, you may not understand this, sir, but I promised father I wouldn't tell any one where we live."

"What?"

"I did, and I can't break a promise!" David insisted. "You see, father was rich once, and he's terribly proud. He doesn't want any one to know we live in such a poor place, because somebody he used to know might hear of it and try to help him, and that would break father's heart."

"His heart's in pretty bad shape, isn't it?" Johnson Boller muttered.

"Frightful!" said David. "And that's why I'll have to go now and explain to him and think it all over and—"

"Why think it over?" Anthony rasped. "Isn't your mind made up now?"

"Of course it is," the boy said hastily. "Only I'll have to tell father and then come back here in the morning, Mr. Fry; only—*I have to go home now!*"

His voice broke strangely.

Anthony Fry looked him over with a quantity of sour curiosity.

If the golden opportunity before his very eyes was making even the trace of an impression on David Prentiss, the boy's faculty for masking his true emotions was downright amazing. That bright, rather attractive young countenance told of absolutely nothing but the heartfelt desire to escape from the gentleman who wished to improve his condition.

It was the same old story, world-old and world-wide. David, once he was out of this apartment, would never return; with opportunity fairly pushing against him, he turned from her in terror, refusing to know that she was there.

Well then, he *should* see her!

Anthony's square chin set. He rose with a jerk and stood surveying the nervous David, a tall, commanding, rather fearsome figure. Some little time he transfixed the lad with his cold, hard eyes, while David grew paler and paler; then he walked down upon David, who cringed visibly, and seized his shoulders.

"David," he said sternly, "you have no conception at all of what I am trying to offer you. I'm going to keep you here until you have."

"Keep me—here?" David faltered.

"Just that."

It was in Johnson Boller's mind to rise and deliver a little speech of his own,

pointing out the legal rights of David Prentiss and the chance that, at some later date, interested parties might hear of this evening and use it in moving Anthony toward an insane asylum. Yet he did not speak, for he grew interested in David himself.

That bewildered youngster was shrinking and shrinking away from Anthony. He was wilting before the stern eye, and he was smiling in the sickliest, most ghastly fashion. And now he was nodding submissively and speaking:

"Yes, I'll stay, Mr. Fry."

"Ah!" said Anthony.

"I—I'm glad to stay," David assured him.

Then, looking at Anthony, he contrived another smile and yawned; and having yawned once, he yawned again, vastly, and stretching the second time.

"The—the trouble with me is that I'm sleepy," David stated, in a strange, low voice. "I get that way because I'm not used to late hours, and when I do get sleepy I—I can't think or talk or do anything. I'll be myself in the morning, Mr. Fry; but if I'm going to stay here, I'd like to go to bed now."

He yawned again and still again, quite noisily and eying Anthony in an odd, expectant, pleading way. Anthony, after a puzzled moment, shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Go to bed if you like, David," he said. "There are one or two things I want to say to you first."

"Yes, sir," David said obediently.

"To-morrow, when you have slept on it, I'm confident that you will see the huge opportunity that I have offered you, and that you will stay with me as one of my little household. It is not an exacting position, but there are one or two laws you must remember. For the first—no dissipation. You don't drink, David?"

"Not a drop, sir."

"And for another," Anthony said gravely, "no women!"

"Eh?" said David.

"Absolutely no women in this Hotel Lasande!" Anthony repeated, with a fanatic force that caused Johnson Boller to snort disgustedly and throw up his hands. "This is, perhaps, more strictly than any other house in New York an all-man establishment. There are not even women servants here, David, and other sorts of women *don't* run in and out of here. In fact, the ladies who do come—relatives of the tenants, of course—are so very few that they're all known to the clerks. So, while you may have a sweetheart, David, and while she may be all very well in her place—keep her out of here!"

"But—"

"That's the unwritten law of the house, and it makes for profound peace," Anthony concluded. "You'll appreciate it more fully when you have lived here for a time."

David, facing Mr. Fry, gazed at the floor and yawned again.

"I guess I'll go to bed," he said weakly.

"And before that we'll start you on the right track," Anthony said with a gentle smile. "You'll take a good, hot bath."

He pressed the button and Wilkins appeared.

"The guest-chamber for young Mr. Prentiss, Wilkins," said Anthony. "You will outfit him with pajamas of my own and the gray bathrobe I used last year. To-morrow we'll get you something that fits, David."

David nodded numbly.

"And, Wilkins," said his master, "you will assist Mr. Prentiss with his bath."

David's nod broke in two.

"I don't want any help," he said.

"But Wilkins—"

"Wilkins or anybody else; I don't want any help with a bath. I know how to take a bath, at least. I don't know how you swells take yours, but I take mine alone; I don't want any one pottering around me, and I won't have it!"

His countenance flushed angrily, and Anthony favored him with an indulgent smile. After all, he was very young.

"As you please, David. Show him to the north bathroom, Wilkins. That is all."

But he tapped Wilkins's shoulder and held him back a moment to add:

"And get his wretched togs, Wilkins. I'll dress him properly to-morrow; but get those rags away from him."

"Very good, sir," said Wilkins, as he glided down the corridor after David.

The proprietor of Fry's Imperial Liniment watched him go and smiled softly, returning to his chair to grin at Johnson Boller in a perfectly human fashion. Johnson Boller, on the other hand, did not grin at all. He merely gazed at his old friend until Anthony asked:

"Well—what do you think?"

"I think you're a nut!" Johnson Boller said with sweet candor. "I think you're a plain da—well, I think you're unbalanced. You know what that young thug will do to you, don't you?"

"Eh?"

"If he's the crook he looks, he'll light out of here about three in the morning with everything but the piano and your encyclopedia. If he isn't a crook, just as soon as he gets loose and talks it over with his friends, he'll have you pinched for detaining him here against his will; and I'll give you ten to one that he collects not less than twenty-five hundred dollars before he's through. You scared him stiff with your eagle eye and your crazy notions, and he pleaded guilty so he could go to bed and get away from you. I'll have to testify to that if he calls on me."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Anthony Fry.

"Is it? Wait and see, Anthony," Johnson Boller said earnestly. "That kid spells trouble. I can feel it in the air."

"You can always feel it in the air," Anthony smiled.

"Maybe so; but this feeling amounts to a pain!" Boller said warmly. "This is a hunch—a premonition—one of those prophetic aches that can't be ignored. Why, he had a fight started before you had spoken ten words to him, and—"

"Oh, rot!" Anthony said.

Johnson Boller drew a deep, concerned breath.

"On the level," he said, "are you going to keep this kid imprisoned here?"

"By no means," Anthony laughed. "As a matter of fact, all I want to do is to talk to him in the morning. I want to know, Johnson, whether he will actually persist in fighting off the chance I'm offering him—because it's so confounded characteristic of the whole human race. If he's as obstinate in the morning as he is now—well, I suppose I'll turn him loose with a ten-dollar bill, and look around for another subject. I'd really like to approach a dozen men, picked haphazard, and write a little paper on the manner in which they greet opportunity."

"Yes, but not while I'm with you," Johnson Boller said. "Anthony, do this—get the kid aside in the morning and tell him you'd been drinking heavily all day and didn't know what you were doing to-night. See? Make a joke of it and slip him fifty to keep quiet, and then—"

"Ah, Wilkins," Anthony smiled. "Got his togs, did you?"

The invaluable one bowed and held the shabby garments at a distance from his person.

"He passed them out to me through a crack in the door," he reported disgustedly. "What shall I do with them? They're hardly worth pressing, sir."

"Of course not. Don't bother with them," Anthony smiled, and waved his man away. "Johnson, turn intelligent for a moment, will you?"

"Why? Intelligence has no place in this evening."

"Oh, yes it has. Let's examine the case of this David youngster and try to reconstruct his emotions and his mental impressions when confronted with opportunity such as—"

"Damn opportunity!" said Johnson Boller, rising with a jerk. "I'm going to bed!"

Only once had Johnson Boller tarried

in Montreal, and on that occasion the thermometer had ranged about ninety in the shade. Yet now, as he slumbered fitfully in Anthony's Circassian guest-chamber, childhood notions of Canada came to haunt his dreams.

He saw snow—long, glistening roads of snow over which Beatrice whizzed in a four-horse sleigh, with driver and footman on the box, and beside her a tall, foreign-looking creature with a big mustache and flashing eyes and teeth. He talked to Beatrice and leaned very close, devouring her beauty with his eyes; and Johnson Boller groaned, woke briefly, and drifted off again.

He saw ice; they were holding an ice carnival in Montreal, and everybody was on skates. Beatrice was on skates, ravishing in white fur, leading some sort of grand march with the Governor General of Canada, who skated very close to her and devoured her beauty with his bold, official eyes, causing Johnson Boller to groan again and thresh over on his other side.

He saw a glittering toboggan slide; laughing people in furs were there at the head of the slide, notably Beatrice, chatting shyly with a blond giant in a Mackinaw, who leaned very close to her as they prepared to coast and devoured her beauty with his large, blue eyes. Now they settled on the toboggan, just these two, although Johnson Bollers astral self seemed to be with them. The blond giant whispered something, and they slid down —down—down!

And they struck something, and Johnson Boller was on his feet in the middle of the Circassian chamber, demanding:

"Wha's that? What was that?"

Somewhere, Anthony was muttering and moving about. Somewhere else, Wilkins was chattering; but the main impression was that the roof had fallen in—and Johnson Boller, struggling into his bathrobe, stumbled to the door and burst into the brilliant living-room.

In the center of the room, flattened upon the floor, was Anthony's substantial little desk. Papers were around it and blotters and letters without number, and the old-fashioned inkwell had shot off its top and set a black streak across the beautiful Oriental carpet.

Two chairs were on their sides, also, but the striking detail of the picture was furnished by David Prentiss. That young man was sprawled crazily, just beyond the desk, and beside him, holding him down with both hands, was Wilkins, tastefully arrayed in the flowered silk pajamas Anthony had discarded last year as too vivid.

"I've got him, sir!" Wilkins's pale lips reported, as his master appeared. "I have him fast."

"What 'd he do?" Johnson Boller asked quickly. "Pull a knife on you, Wilkins?"

"He'd no time for that, sir," Wilkins said grimly. "I think he stumbled over a chair and took the desk along with him, trying to get out. I always wake just as the clock strikes two, and stay awake ten minutes or more, and that's how I came to hear him and get him. He was just getting to his feet when I ran in and turned on the lights, and he—"

"Let him up!" Anthony said sharply.

"But don't let go of him!" Johnson Boller said harshly. "I missed the time by an hour, but I was right otherwise, Anthony. He's got the silver and your stick-pins and rings on him, and—what the dickens is he wearing?"

Silence fell upon them for a little, as David struggled to his feet and looked about with a strange, trancelike stare—for there was some reason for Mr. Boller's query.

David, apparently, had dressed for the street. He wore shoes not less than five sizes too long; he wore a bright-brown sack coat which came almost to his knees, and blue trousers which were turned up until they all but met the coat. He had acquired a rakish felt hat, too, which rested mainly on the back of his neck.

"He got them clothes out of the junk-closet at the end of the corridor, sir,"

Wilkins said quite breathlessly. "He must have been roaming the place for quite a bit, to have found them, and—"

"What were you trying to do, David?" Anthony snapped.

"I don't know, sir," David said vaguely, passing a hand over his eyes in a manner far too dramatic to be convincing.

"Where did you get those clothes?"

"I have no idea, sir," David murmured.

"Don't lie to me!" Anthony snapped. "What—"

"I'm not lying, sir," David said in the same vague, far-away tone. "I must have been asleep, Mr. Fry. I remember having a terrible dream—it was about father and it seemed to me that he was dying. There were doctors all about the bed and father was calling to me, and it seemed to me that I must get to him, no matter what stood in the way. I remember trying to go to him, and then—why, I must have fallen there, sir, and wakened."

For an instant the vagueness left his eyes and they looked straight at Anthony.

"May I go to father now?" he asked. "That—that dream upset me."

"Morning will do for father," Anthony said briefly.

"But I have a feeling that something terrible's going to happen if I don't go—"

Anthony Fry laid a kindly hand on his shoulder.

"Get back to bed, youngster," he smiled. "You're nervous, I suppose, being in a strange bed, and all that sort of thing. And incidentally, get off those clothes and give them to Wilkins."

David gulped audibly.

"I'll pass them out to Wilkins, if I must, sir," he said in the queerest, choking voice—and he turned from them and shuffled down the corridor to the north bedroom of Anthony Fry's apartment.

"Curious kid!" Anthony muttered.

"Not nearly as curious as you are," said Johnson Boller. "You didn't even go through his pockets and get out the stuff while he was here, and we could see just what he'd taken! You let him go in there and dump the pockets before he gives up the clothes and—"

Anthony permitted himself a grin and a yawn.

"My dear chap, go back to bed and forget it," he said impatiently. "The boy was stealing nothing. He may have been trying to escape; he may have been walking in his sleep. Consciously or subconsciously, he's certainly giving us a demonstration of humanity's tendency to dodge its opportunities."

Johnson Boller gave it up and returned, soured, to his Circassian walnut bedstead —soured because, if there was one thing above all others that he abominated, it was being routed out in the middle of the night.

Five minutes or more he spent in muttering before he drifted away again, this time to arrive at somebody's grand ball in Montreal. It was a tremendous function, plainly given in honor of Beatrice's arrival in town, yet she was not immediately visible. Johnson Boller's dream personality hunted around for some time before it found her in the conservatory.

Behind thick palms, Beatrice sat with a broad-shouldered person in the uniform of a field-marshal; he had a string of medals on his chest, and he was devouring her beauty with his hungry eyes. Nay, more, he leaned close to Beatrice and sought to take her hand, and although she shrank from him in terror, there was a certain fascinated light in her own lovely black eyes; she clutched her bosom and sought to escape, but—

"Oh, my Lord!" said Johnson Boller, awakening to stare at the dark ceiling with wide-open eyes.

Somewhere a window slammed.

He listened for a little and heard nothing more; then, having the room nearest the elevators, he heard one of them hum up swiftly and heard the gate clatter open. And then there were voices and some one knocked on the door of the apartment with a club, as it seemed. Somebody else protested and pressed the buzzer—and by that time Wilkins had

padded down the hall and was opening the door.

Johnson Boller caught:

"Police officer! Lemme in quick! You've got a burglar in there!"

## CHAPTER V.

### THE WEE SMA' HOURS.

WILKINS, in his official black, was a wonderfully self-contained person; roused from slumber in pink-rosed silk, his self-control was not so perfect, for as he struggled out of bed again Johnson Boller caught:

"God bless my soul, officer! What—"

"Hush!" interrupted an unfamiliar, horrified voice. "Come inside quickly and close that door."

Anthony was in motion, too. Johnson Boller, stumbling out of his Circassian apartment, met him just entering the living-room from his own chamber, and for an instant they stared at one another as they knotted bathrobe cords about them.

"You see?" Johnson Boller said, with acid triumph. "I was right, eh?"

"What?"

"The cops have tracked the little devil down for his last job, whatever that may have been, and they've found him *here!* Now you've got a nice scandal on your hands, haven't you? A tenth-rate kid crook found hiding in the flat of Mr. Anthony Fry, with the full knowledge and consent of—"

"Upon my word, Johnson, I think you've lost your senses to-night!" Anthony snapped. "Whatever is wrong, Wilkins?"

The silk-pajamaed one indicated their visitors with a hand that was none too steady.

"It's Mr. Dodbury, the night-manager, sir, and this policeman that says—"

"I'm afraid you have a burglar in here, Mr. Fry," the manager put in agitatedly. "I can't understand how it occurred; nothing of the kind has ever happened to us before, and the mouth of that alley is constantly under the eye of the firemen on that side of the boiler-room. Moreover, there is a high gate from the street and I cannot believe that any one—"

The burly officer halted him.

"Well, however he got there, he was on the fire-escape and coming down when I see him from the street," he said energetically. "When he seen me he turned into this north window and closed it after him, and my partner 'd have given me the whistle if he'd come out again. Which room will it be, now?"

Wilkins glanced significantly at his master.

"If it's the north room on the fire-escape, sir, it must be the room young Mr. Prentiss has to-night."

"And a burglar is supposed to have gone in there?" Anthony said calmly.

"He ain't supposed to—he went! I seen him!" stated the law. "And the longer we stand here and talk about it, the more chance he has to kill whoever's in there!"

"Well, as it happens, he isn't killing any one, because he isn't there," Mr. Fry said patiently and with just a touch of contempt. "Any one entering that room must have wakened Mr. Prentiss, and he certainly hasn't called for help. For that matter, I should have heard the window myself, because I sleep very lightly. Nevertheless, if you wish, we will go in there."

Impressively dignified even in his bathrobe, Anthony led the way down the side corridor, with the four trailing after him. They came to the door, and the officer pushed forward, club raised grimly over his right shoulder as he laid his left hand on the knob.

"Where's the light-switch in there?" he whispered.

"Right by the door," Wilkins supplied.

"Duck in the second I turn the knob, throw on the light, and then dodge along the wall," the law commanded briefly. "Are you ready?"

The invaluable one muttered his assent. The knob turned soundlessly and the door

flew open. Wilkins, with a distinctly terrified little wheeze, pushed in, jabbed at the button, and scurried down the room on his hands and knees, eyes shut to shield his brain from the horrible impression.

Yet there was no hint of anything horrible. With all four corners of the room in plain sight, with the empty closet partly open and its interior fully visible, no burglar crouched, pistol in hand—no masked malefactor leaped forward to stun the officer with his padded lead-pipe. Only David Prentiss was in the room, and David slumbered sweetly in the bed, the covers pulled tight up around his young chin, a gentle dream-smile upon his regular features.

"Well, wotter yuh know about—" the officer began.

"Hush!" Anthony said gently.

"What?"

"Don't wake the youngster!" Anthony whispered sharply. "There's no need for that, officer. Look around if you like and then let us get out of here."

He folded his arms and waited, while the officer, visibly puzzled, poked about the room, and Wilkins, on his feet and smiling sheepishly, tiptoed to the door—while the night manager of the Lasande stepped in and looked about with a mixture of perplexity and relief, and Johnson Boller stood and stared at the sleeping David.

"Are you quite sure it was this window, officer?" the manager asked.

"I am that, if this is the one next to the corner of the house."

"But are you quite sure that you didn't imagine it?" Anthony asked tartly.

The policeman looked him over gravely.

"Boss, when I can see a man in black clothes staring down at me, letting off a little howl of fright, and then turning around and going into a window—when I can see that and it ain't there, I'll turn in my tin and go back to the docks. The guy came in this window and—"

"Well, since it is quite evident that he didn't, he couldn't have come in," the manager of the faultless hotel said hastily, as he caught Anthony's expression. "You've made a mistake in the window, officer. We'll go down and look up from the street again and see just what window you do mean."

"But—"

"We will not bother the gentlemen further," Mr. Dodbury said firmly.

Anthony nodded.

"Show them out, Wilkins. Come, Johnson."

"Wait a second," Johnson Boller said softly, as the others filed out of sight.

"Wait for what?"

"I want to admire this little cherub, sleeping here so soundly," Mr. Boller muttered.

"Don't be absurd! Come and—"

This thing of losing sleep rendered Johnson Boller uglier than could anything else in the world.

"Are they out of hearing?" he said. "All right. Somebody did close a window in here. I heard it close!"

"When?"

"Five minutes before the last excitement," said Mr. Boller. "How many pair of pajamas did Wilkins give this kid?"

"What? One pair, I suppose. Why?"

Johnson Boller grinned almost wickedly.

"Because there's a pajama suit under that chair and it's been worn!" said he. "What's the kid wearing in bed there?"

He stepped forward suddenly and jerked back the covers, and Anthony stepped forward with a sharp little exclamation, for David Prentiss, although he seemed to slumber between the sheets, wore a suit of black clothes and a pair of black shoes, and beside him a black felt hat was crumpled!

"Maybe that cop wasn't the idiot he seemed, eh?" Johnson Boller asked.

"I don't understand it," Anthony said angrily. "I—David!"

The boy merely sighed in his sleep and turned on his back.

"*David!*" Johnson Boller snapped, thrusting a hard forefinger directly into the pit of David's stomach.

"Good gracious!" gasped David Prentiss, sitting up and staring about with eyes wide open. "What—I must have been asleep and—"

Anthony's gaze was growing keener and angrier by the second.

"Never mind that artistic amazement, David," he said sourly. "What were you trying to do?"

"Trying?" echoed David. "To do?"

"Those are Wilkins's clothes. Where did you get them?"

"I—don't know."

"Yes, you do!" Anthony snapped. "You must have found them in his room. Well?"

David gazed up at him with the same unfathomable look that had so disturbed Johnson Boller in the taxicab.

"Very well—I did find them in his room," he said. "I put them on because I couldn't find my own clothes, and I—I wanted to get to father."

"Yes, and now you're going to father!" Johnson Boller said decisively. "Better let him go, Anthony."

David was on his feet with one swing.

"That's the only thing to do with me," he said heartily. "I'm too much of a nuisance to keep around, Mr. Fry; I'm so worried about father that I can't think of anything else. So now I'll go and—"

"So now you'll stay right here!" Anthony said fiercely.

"Why?" Boller asked.

"Because I've undertaken to show this kid the opportunity of his lifetime, and I'll drive it into his infernal little skull if I have to chloroform him and have a surgeon drill a hole to let it through!" Mr. Fry said quite irresponsibly.

David collapsed hopelessly on the edge of the bed.

"I—I should think you'd be so out of patience with me—" he began sadly.

"I am, but I'm not going to drop the job on that account," Anthony said grimly. "Shed those clothes, David."

"I'll shed 'em when you go out," David said monotonously. "I—I'd rather undress alone."

Johnson Boller's plump hands were on his plump hips and he surveyed his old friend darkly.

"Are you actually going to keep the youngster here against his will?" he demanded.

"I am!" snapped Anthony Fry.

Johnson Boller swallowed his wondering rage.

"I hope you get all that's coming to you!" he said. "I hope he sues you for a million dollars and collects every penny of it!"

And he turned and thumped out of David's chamber, down the corridor, and into the living-room, across the living-room, and into his own bedchamber—and there for a little he sat on the edge of the bed and swore aloud.

Presently he heard Anthony come through from David's room, muttering to himself; he heard the switch snap, and the streak of light under his door vanished.

With a long, weary groan, Johnson Boller slipped back to slumberland, and presently he was again in Montreal. It was still winter, and they were holding a skiing contest. Beatrice was there at the top of the slide, and beside her stood a tall, foppish youth with a little blond mustache. He leaned very close to Beatrice as he spoke, and devoured her beauty with his hungry eyes.

In the East the first gray light of dawn was streaking the skies.

In Anthony Fry's living-room, ever so faintly, objects just took shape in the gloom, coming foggily out of the inky blackness that had been, even ten minutes ago. Down the corridor a door creaked, and for a minute or more after the creak the stillness was even more pronounced.

Then, had one been awake and listening, the softest, lightest shuffle came from the corridor—paused—moved on again. There was a sharp intake of breath and

the almost inaudible sound of a hand feeling along the corridor wall, feeling along and feeling along, until it touched the curtains of the living-room.

In the wide doorway of the dusky place an indefinite, strange figure appeared and stopped. It wore slippers, several sizes too large. It wore a bathrobe of gray, so long that its owner held it up from the floor to avoid tripping. It wore pajamas, too, and of these the legs were upturned almost one foot—for they were Anthony's pajamas.

Warily the figure gazed about, squinting through the gloom for half a minute, listening intently. Its frowzy brown head nodded then and the bathrobed one tiptoed on, now with a definite idea of direction. Past Anthony's door it went and past Johnson Boller's, without a sound, without a slip—stopped to listen again, and then scuffed on toward the far corner, where stood the little telephone table.

And now, trembling, the figure settled on the stool, and shaky hands gripped the instrument itself. The receiver went to its ear and the figure whispered into the transmitter—trembled the harder and waited through minutes that were hours, while from behind Johnson Boller's door came an irregular snore and an occasional groan, as some new fiend sought to capture Beatrice's slender hand.

Suddenly a visible shock ran through the stealthy figure at the telephone. The trembling ceased abruptly and the figure stiffened, leaning forward eagerly and cupping a hand about the transmitter. Thrice it whispered shrilly, nodding desperately at the uncomprehending instrument; and at last the listener at the other end seemed to understand, for the figure pressed lips even closer and spoke swiftly.

A full two minutes of sharp whispering and it waited—listened and nodded animatedly—spoke again, enunciating each word clearly and still so softly that one across the living-room could not have heard.

Without the suggestion of a click, the receiver was returned to its hook. The figure rose cautiously and peered all about, through the shadows, getting its bearings once more. Again the bath-robe was gathered high above the grotesquely slippered feet; again the figure shuffled along, moving toward the doorway.

Without a stumble it threaded its mysterious way between chairs and little tables, divans and cases and pedestals, until it came safely to the corridor. There it paused for an instant, and in the gloom the faintest, excited giggle issued from beside the curtains. Then the corridor doorway was empty, and Johnson Boller snored on and groaned.

At the end of the corridor David Prentiss's door closed and utter stillness rested upon the apartment again.

After the skiing contest, although Johnson Boller did not seem to be present at the end, all hands trooped off to a clubhouse of some kind and there was a general jollification. Lovely women, handsome men grouped about a long table, and waiters rushed hither and thither, bearing viands and wine—although mostly wine.

He of the little blond mustache sat beside Beatrice, and as the champagne came around for the second or third time he leaped from his chair. Glass high held, he pointed to Johnson Boller's lovely wife with the other hand; he was beginning a toast, the temperature and intimacy of which caused Johnson Boller's fists to clench, and—he woke with a violent jerk and stared at the ceiling.

It was daylight—had been daylight for some time, apparently, because an early sun was reflected from the high building on the other side of the street. Wilkins seemed to be moving around, too, which indicated that it was at least six o'clock.

Johnson Boller stretched and snarled; he had had a wretched night of it! He was tired all through, as he was always tired when his rest had been broken. He was ugly as sin, too, and almost at once he found his ugliness focusing on young David Prentiss.

If Anthony Fry had carried his obsession over into the daylight, if he still persisted in poking his idiotic opportunity at David and the end of it did not seem to be in sight, Johnson Boller decided that the empty flat on Riverside should know its master's presence hereafter and —Boller sat up in bed, listening.

That was certainly Wilkins's voice, raised in horror—ah, and Wilkins was hurrying, too. Or no, it couldn't be Wilkins; that was somebody a good deal lighter, rushing along the corridor. And now the oddest babel of voices had risen, with Wilkins thrusting in an incoherent word here and there—and now the voices were growing fainter, all of a sudden, and he could hear Anthony Fry stirring in the next room.

Something new had happened! Johnson Boller, swinging out of bed, jammed his feet into his slippers and snatched up his bath-robe. Another night like this, and he'd be ready for emergency drill with a fire company.

Not that there was any need for haste, though. By the time he had opened the door and stepped into the living-room the little excitement seemed to have quieted down again. Anthony, bath-robed also, was just issuing from his bedroom, and again they gazed at one another.

"What was it that time?" Johnson Boller asked.

"I've no idea. Did you hear it, too?"

"Naturally. I—"

"Why, Wilkins!" Anthony Fry all but gasped, as his servitor appeared in the doorway. "What under the sun's the matter with you?"

"My—my eye, sir!" choked the faithful one. "It's downright scandalous, Mr. Fry!"

"What is?"

"The—the woman, sir! The woman that's come to see him!"

His jaw sagged senselessly and his blank eyes regarded his master quite fishily; and Anthony, after a wondering second or so, scuffed over to him and snapped:

"What's wrong with you, Wilkins? What woman came?"

"A—a young Frenchwoman, I should judge, sir," Wilkins stammered. "She came to the door here, getting past the office I don't know how. At any rate, she came, sir, and said some gibberish about Mr. David Prentiss, and with that she was past me and inside, Mr. Fry."

"Where is she now?"

"Well, she—she's in his bedroom, sir!" Wilkins stated. "The young chap came flying out like a madman, Mr. Fry, and threw his arms around her, speaking French as I suppose. And she—she threw her arms around Mr. Prentiss, sir, and with that they—well, they're in there now, sir."

Johnson Boller laughed unpleasantly.

"Picked off a live one, didn't you, Anthony?" said he. "There's nothing slow about David. He comes here and settles down at midnight, and his lady friends are calling by six the next morning. When you—"

Anthony had passed him, chin set and lips rather white.

There are some places where the questionable may be passed over quite lightly. The Hotel Lasande is not one of these places. There are thousands upon thousands of bachelors who would merely have grinned interestedly at the news; Anthony, being impeccable and a genuine woman-hater at heart, was not of these thousands. Hence, even his lean and aristocratic cheeks were white as he rattled at the knob of David's door.

He had expected to find it locked, and in that he was disappointed. The door gave quite readily, admitting Anthony and Johnson Boller as well—and for a matter of seconds they stood transfixed before the picture.

Beyond question, the woman was there!

She was little and very dark, decidedly pretty, for that matter, and obviously fond of David Prentiss; she sat at David's side on the edge of the bed and her arms were about David—while young

Mr. Prentiss himself held her fast and seemed in a high state of excitement.

Even as the door opened, they had been speaking, both at the same time and both in French, in itself rather an astonishing phenomenon; but as the bath-robed gentlemen stopped beside them they ceased speaking. They merely clutched each other the tighter and looked at Anthony.

"Well?" Anthony Fry said slowly, and his voice was a terrible thing to hear.

"Well?" David said faintly.

His pretty little friend broke into a torrent of French, of which, unfortunately, neither Anthony nor Johnson Boller could make anything at all. David, with a long, gasping intake of his breath, muttered something to her, and that proving futile, put a gentle hand over her mouth. The girl, looking at Anthony, burst suddenly into loud and hysterical weeping!

"For Heaven's sake, shut her up!" gasped the master of the apartment.

"You started her—it was the way you looked at her!' David said thickly.

"Well, you stop her or I'll wring your neck!" Anthony panted. "You can hear that over half the house."

He turned his eye back to the unfortunate and froze her into sudden silence. Shaking, the girl crouched closer to David Prentiss, and Anthony drew breath once more.

It was a horrible thing that had happened, of course—this coming of a strange woman into his apartment. It was likely to take a good deal of explaining to the management of the Lasande, too, later on. But he had brought it upon himself, and the realization caused Anthony's white fury to glow.

"This—this woman is a friend of yours?" he choked.

"One of the—best friends I have!" David faltered.

"How does she come to be here?"

"I—sent for her," David confessed. "I telephoned and—"

"All right. That's enough," Anthony Fry said, composure returning in some degree. "Can she speak English?"

"Not one word."

"Positively," the master of the apartment said slowly, "the thing to do is to have you both arrested, David. Don't start like that and don't speak! There is a certain presumption that this woman is some sort of accomplice, David—not much, perhaps, but one strong enough to hold you until both of you had learned a lesson!"

David, himself white to the lips, was beyond words.

"Nevertheless," Anthony pursued, only a trifle more gently, "I shall go to no such length, because of the character of the house and the personal reflection such a mess would cast upon myself. Tell the woman to go, David, and then you and I will have a little chat."

"But—" David whispered.

"Tell her to go this instant!" Anthony thundered.

The boy in the oversize bath-robe looked at his girl friend with stricken eyes—looked at Anthony for an instant, and turned away as swiftly. He swallowed, and, lips trembling, addressed the little French girl; and she started from him and threw out her hands in horror, pouring out a torrent of words. David spoke again, however, and she rose to her feet, swaying.

"Show the woman to the door, Wilkins, and to the back stairs," Anthony ordered, restraining himself with a considerable effort. "Be sure she doesn't go near the elevators. Quick!"

David spoke again, in French and in a strange, low, forlorn wail. The girl, as if at an eternal parting, thrust out the expressive hands once more and gurgled hysterical Gallic snatches; and then Wilkins had laid a hand on her shoulder, turned her about, and she was gone.

Johnson Boller looked after them and at his old friend.

"Aren't you going to send the youngster after her?" he asked with the superior air of a man who has proved his case beyond a doubt.

"Quite possibly," Anthony said, smil-

ing a dangerous little smile. " But I mean to have a chat with David first."

Johnson Boller gazed at David for a moment and smiled himself, almost happily. Unless indications were highly deceptive, Anthony, with his precious reputation all mussed up by the pretty little French girl, was mad enough to beat up David.

But Johnson Boller had no idea of sitting around and watching it, later to waste days in a police court for David's wretched sake. Hence he thumped heavily out of David's room and back again to his own.

Alone with his find, Anthony said not a word for a full minute, nor did David. The boy, hunched on the edge of his bed, had passed the capability of motion and even of thought; he merely stared at Anthony with dazed, thunderstruck eyes that were very far from being intelligent.

"David," Anthony said savagely, " however slightly unusual the circumstances may have been, I brought you to this apartment for your own good."

" Um," David said numbly.

" And last night I laid down for you the rule that you were to have no women here."

David said nothing at all.

" Yet even before we've dressed this morning, you manage to worm an infernal woman in here and—what the devil do you mean by it, anyway, you infernal little whelp?" Anthony cried, as his temper snapped. " Don't sit there and shiver! Answer me!"

Still David said nothing.

" Answer or I'll shake some wits into you!" Anthony cried.

And by way of doing this he seized David's thick brown hair and gave a first, threatening shake.

And having shaken—Anthony Fry, the chilly and self-contained, emitted one rattling, half-shrieking gasp and reeled backward!

**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.**

# HIS FIRST GIRL

## BY J. EDWARD TUFFT

RAISE the blind a trifle, mother, and we'll peek as they go by; it's a circus just to watch him, though I'm crushing back a cry. Awkward, graceful, that describes him; stiff, but easy; timid—bold; proud, but bashful; wretched—happy; pale, but blushing; young, but old! He wanted us to see him, that is why he chose this street, yet he's fearful lest we're watching, and he's ready to retreat. He lifts his feet so canny, and he's conscious of their size; his hands seem far too many, yet how valiantly he tries to hold that pink umbrella with an easy, jaunty grace, and keep the vicious sunshine from her dainty little face!

I see now why he wanted that nifty English suit—it didn't seem consistent that he'd want it for the shoot; those classy hose and oxfords!—that was all a bit of bait when he talked about the tourney—the young rascal had a "date"! There was a time (remember?), and it isn't many moons since he loved to stroll with daddy on his Sunday afternoons; but the *fellows* ousted daddy, and they owned him for a while, but now he's taken over by a lady and a smile!

Look, they're turning at the corner! Did you ever see the beat? He's walking next the buildings, and she's walking next the street! Green, is he? Gold will polish; he'll recover, bless the lad; but we've lost and can't recover—we, his mother and his dad!

# An Astral Gentleman

by Robert Wilbur Lull and Lillian M. Ainsworth

## A "DIFFERENT" STORY

"POOR James had a most uncomfortable habit the last years he lived of taking what he called astral journeys."

"How singular!"

"Yes, I often told him that some day he'd come back and not be able to get in—to his body, I mean. But he'd never listen; was so sure of himself, like all men. Poor James!"

My wife was softly rocking to and fro as she sat by a window in the comfortable living-room of a hospitable neighbor's home. As she rocked, she gazed sadly at a heap of ashes out yonder—all that remained of our home—hers and mine.

On a divan in a corner of the room sat myself, an uncanny guest, invisible to my wife and the neighbor to whom she was talking.

My wife had never been in sympathy with my occult investigations. The unfortunate occurrence that had deprived me of my physical body, when I had confidently expected to occupy it for many years to come, left her in the position of being able to have the last word unchallenged, audibly at least. No doubt, if she had been aware of my presence, she would have exulted, "I told you so!"

Being absent at the time of the incident referred to, I had not been able until now to learn the full particulars of it. I had been a deep student of occult science for years, and had startled and interested my scientific friends on many occasions by the nature of the phenomena I had been able to produce. I was a natural psychic, and, being deeply interested in these matters, had developed my powers to a remarkable extent. As stated by my wife, I had become able to leave the body at will and journey to any place I wished to go on the earth.

A short time previous to the opening of this tale I had been absent on a more extended trip than usual, when suddenly I felt the tiny cord, which connects the astral with the physical body, snap; and, realizing what it portended, started swifter than the wings of light for home.

Too late! When I arrived our house was a mass of flames. My distracted wife stood by wringing her hands, and my

neighbors, whose attempts to remove my body from the burning house had proved so futile, now witnessed the scene in despair.

I was in a badly disturbed state of mind myself. I fully realized that without a physical body, I should no longer be able to manifest myself on the earth plane, and I was not yet prepared to enter higher spheres to remain. Indeed, I had no desire to.

As I saw my home crumble to ashes, and witnessed my neighbors, later, in their attempts to gather the charred fragments of bone that had so shortly before constituted my physical frame, I had ample opportunity to realize what a peculiar and unpleasant predicament I was in.

I was in the strange and inconsistent position of being a live dead man. My astral body, which had gone out for a little tour of investigation, was from now on to be a wayfarer in invisible realms, unless I could find some means of accomplishing a physical embodiment.

Now, a few days later, I was an unbidden and unobtrusive visitor in the home of the neighbor who had so kindly invited my wife to share her hospitality after the fire.

"Tell me just how it happened," this good lady was saying for the fifth time.

"Well, you see, James had gone to his attic-room, where he was accustomed to making these experiments. It was late in the afternoon. The house was still as death. I thought as long as he was traveling around, the Lord knew where, in his astral body, I would just go over for a little call on Mrs. Lane. All at once my attention was arrested by the sight of smoke pouring out the chamber windows of our house. We were nearly crazed with fright—I was, at least.

"Fire must have caught from the chimney and got pretty good headway before we saw it, for it was too late to save anything when we got help and reached the house. I screamed to the men that James was asleep up-stairs—I was sensitive about his queer experiments—and they rushed in to try to save him, but it was no use.

"What I'd like to know," added my wife with a sigh, "is whether James sensed danger and got back before the body burned, or whether he is wandering around bodiless, wishing he had taken my advice."

The latter was so true that I jumped up to try to admit the fact. But I fell back disheartened. What was the use? I had tried repeatedly to make my wife understand that I was present, but my efforts were perfectly futile. She was utterly lacking in that supersensitiveness that enables one to catch vibrations from the astral plane. I had always realized it. Now I understood it with keen and peculiar sorrow.

As a sense of the utter helplessness of my position grew upon me, a resolution, born of despair, arose within me. I would find some means of once more expressing myself on the physical plane, if it took years of study and effort to accomplish it.

To-day I can look back with a fair degree of calmness upon the experiences I encountered before my purpose was finally achieved.

## II.

THE plan which I conceived and at last accomplished, was to hover near persons who were taking final leave of the physical and attempt to enter and make use of the shell they were quitting. As one can readily see, this was highly impractical, and after many futile attempts I began to believe it impossible, for in almost every case when the body is finally vacated, it is because it is utterly incapacitated, either by disease or accident, for further use.

Naturally, I was somewhat particular what sort of a body I found expression in, although, of course, one could not be *too* critical in a case of this sort. I finally got to the pass where I was willing to take up with almost anything. I didn't relish the idea of reincarnating in female form, for I was masculine to the core. Then,

too, I still held a lingering hope that I might be reunited to my wife if I accomplished my purpose.

Hospitals became my favorite resorts. Especially did I haunt operating-tables. I clung to them with the desperate hope that a drowning man clings to a plank thrown out to him amid waters that threaten to engulf him.

Several times when I had become, as I thought, securely ensconced in the frame of a man who had gone out while under the anesthetic, I found myself compelled in turn to vacate; the powers of life being too feeble to rally.

One instance I recall with especial vividness, and the pang with which I realized that I was again to be unsuccessful still hurts at times.

The victim was a man of about my own build, handsome, intelligent, and of a far more prepossessing appearance than myself. I judged him to be a professional man, and I thought, with a little thrill of pride, what a fine appearance I would make could I secure admission to this excellent specimen of humanity.

He was just undergoing an operation for appendicitis when I arrived. I overheard one of the surgeons remark that, having been attacked so suddenly and while in such fine physical condition, there was practically no doubt regarding his surviving the operation splendidly.

I saw there was slim show for me, but having nothing especial in view, I hung around, shadowed the poor chap, until they had the incision closed and everything in shipshape condition.

All at once they discovered that the heart was not doing duty properly. I saw his astral body leaving before the surgeons realized that their patient was beyond their poor, human aid. I watched my chance cold-bloodedly, if such a term may be applied to one devoid of flesh and blood, but it was absolutely no use. There wasn't a ghost of a show for me in this instance.

I felt rather guilty, too, as a man might who was waiting to burglarize a house as soon as its owner was out of sight. As I turned to go there stood the man's astral body beside the operating-table, and his reproachful look indicated that he read my selfish purpose. I extended my hand, we shook and parted.

After this experience I lost courage for a time, and I determined to abandon hospitals. I had discovered a fact that surprised me somewhat—namely, that when hospital surgeons make a corpse of a man's body, it is usually in no condition for further occupancy.

For a time I wandered about miserably, staying for the most part near my poor wife, who was ever lamenting my sad fate. She had rented a little cottage near the site of our former one, and lived there alone. Her evident loneliness moved me to deep pity, and I bitterly upbraided myself for the needless misery I had caused her.

Existence became a curse. I was of no use in this world in my present condition, and was not yet ready to enter other realms.

## III.

I HAD been in this unhappy state of mind for several months, when unexpectedly a marvelous occurrence befell me. It was upon a wild, stormy evening in late autumn. The wind howled dismally, rising into shrieks and wails, dying away into moans that sent children shuddering under the bedclothes and brought to grown-ups visions of wrecks at sea, dead men, shrieks of the dying, and of lost souls. It was a night for ghosts to walk.

I wandered forth, fit companion for spooks, but no friendly specter greeted my forlorn gaze.

I had not traveled far when I espied an inanimate human form lying limp upon the wet earth, his thin, starved face turned to the pitiless heavens. A lamentable object he appeared, clothed in filthy rags, hair long and unkempt, hands and face unwashed, save by the rain and sleet that beat so mercilessly upon them.

I discovered the body to be still warm,

and found that life was just deporting. My old desire for reincarnation gripped me mightily. But *this* revolting creature! I was sickened by its repulsiveness. Still, beggars shouldn't be choosers—and there was no time to lose. I must decide quickly.

Decide I did. Quick as thought I took possession of this house of clay that was already stiffening in the rigor of death. I am positive this attempt would have proved as useless as former ones had if it had not been for the timely appearance on the scene of another specimen, uglier looking, if possible, than the one whose body I was occupying. He skulked along through the wind-tossed shrubbery near by, head down fighting the wind. Suddenly he halted.

"Hello, pal!" he exclaimed with a start, espying his erstwhile companion in hoboism prone before him. "What yer doin' here?"

He knelt down, and after a hasty examination produced from the recesses of his tatters a bottle from which he poured down the throat of his unresisting comrade some of the vilest whisky it had ever been my lot to taste.

Its effect, however, was magical. Burning its way into the system, it soon set the vital machinery in motion. Slowly and spasmodically at first, but with increasing regularity, the heart resumed its beating; the lungs commenced once more their function. The numbness and rigidity of the limbs wore away by degrees. The body that I had so surreptitiously appropriated was going to live.

I was so elated I nearly shouted for joy.

The erstwhile owner of this disreputable-looking organism must have been well satisfied to dispense with it, for he didn't show up to dispute my claim, and henceforth I called it *my* body; and uncouth and repulsive as it was, I was mighty glad to have it to call my own.

With the aid of my companion I struggled unsteadily to my feet. My insides were still aflame with the rank potion I had swallowed, and I was weak and trembling from fatigue, hunger, and exposure.

My rescuer half dragged and half carried me to a rude shed near by in which hay had been stacked. Here, with rough tenderness, he made me a comfortable resting-place. Then he left me for a while, coming back later with a pocketful of fresh eggs and a pail of warm milk. He had stolen a pail and milked a cow in a neighboring farmyard, and robbed the nests in the farmer's henhouse, but I blessed him for it.

I had the lion's share of the spoils, and my comrade watched with evident satisfaction my returning strength. He was a taciturn fellow and not used to the little courtesies of life. I wanted to express my gratitude to him, but when I attempted to thank him in words that seemed fitted to be used to a man who had just saved my life, and done more for me than he could ever realize, he looked suspicious.

"Nutty?" he inquired sarcastically. "Can it, and go ter sleep."

Whereupon I meekly burrowed into the hay and pondered over the first difficulty I had met with. This tramp's body was no place for an astral gentleman. That was sure. I must either adapt myself to the body, or adapt the body to my real self. I finally fell asleep, and slept soundly till morning.

As I awoke the strangeness of my situation slowly dawned upon me. I must plan a course of action before the man, who was snoring loudly by my side, awoke. I began to realize keenly the truth of a well-known and generally accepted fact—the influence bodily conditions exert upon the mentality.

My system was craving its morning grog and almost making me believe it really required it. Perhaps it did. The bodily habits of years are not easily overcome.

I tried to decide what to do. Should I sneak out carefully, desert my companion, clean up, and straightway begin my new life, or should I stay with him and hit the hoboes' trail for a few days?

My soliloquy was cut short by the appearance of a farmer and his hired man, who came with forks to carry hay to their stock near by. I followed a sudden impulse, and asked the farmer if I might work and earn my breakfast. He looked me over from head to feet.

"You're a pretty tough-looking specimen," he ejaculated; "but you're the first one of your kind that's offered to work for a meal of victuals in the last six months. Come on."

"What's chewin' yer?" inquired my indignant pal in a venomous stage-whisper. "Yer must be dippy for fair. I'll wait at the cross road, and don't be long comin'."

My partner was evidently in evil mood. His slumbers had been disturbed by the appearance of the farmer. Furthermore, something in my bearing and manner of speech seemed to fill him with astonishment not unmingled with disgust. I allowed him to go his way, while I followed the farmer.

The next hour was as hard a one as I ever experienced. My physical body was weak and emaciated from lack of proper nourishment and from irregular habits and dissipation. My astral body was ill fitted to such a garment. I was fighting these difficulties in an effort to earn a decent breakfast. After what seemed an interminable length of time the morning chores were finished and we went to the house, where I was given an appetizing and nourishing breakfast.

Imagine, if you can, what food tasted like to a man who had wandered about for weeks with no body with which to assimilate it! No doubt, when the spirit reaches the pure realm which is its final destination, the desire for creature comforts will vanish; but my case had been entirely different.

I had been living amid earthly scenes as truly as when clothed in flesh, but with no vehicles through which to partake of them. I had been an outcast from my own fireside, a silent spectator at my own table. I had been neither seen nor in any way recognized by those dearest to me, and had I been able to manifest myself to them, I should have only struck terror to their hearts.

Surely not an enviable position to be in!

After breakfast I told my new friends that I had decided to turn over a new leaf, and implored their assistance. I proposed they help me to clean and respectable clothing and a bath, hair-cut, and shave. I entreated them so earnestly and promised so faithfully to repay them in labor that, after holding a family council, they consented.

The transformation in a personal appearance at the end of an hour was magical. I began to have more courage regarding my future. My gentlemanly bearing and evident zeal and determination to clean up and earn an honest living made a favorable impression, and awakened sympathy in the warm hearts of these good people whom I had been fortunate enough to find, and they did everything possible to help me. I stayed with them some time, working at hard, manual labor I was ill-accustomed to.

But I encountered struggles more severe than I had expected. My body had been the home of a degenerate, idle, and besotted creature for years. The organs were deranged and weakened from ill nourishment and poor whisky. Filth, slothfulness, and evil habits had placed their curse upon what had once been the fair temple of a human soul. I had never before realized how closely is the physical organism allied with the mental and spiritual.

With a courage born of despair I set about to overcome these difficulties, and prove that the real man can surmount almost any bodily condition if he makes a superhuman effort.

I was becoming fairly well accustomed to my new body, and found it serving my purposes admirably. While I could not hope to alter the physiognomy to any extent, yet one looking in my face might have said, "It is the same, yet not the same; it is illumined from within by in-

telligence, purpose, and ideals that are worth while. A different character shines through."

Certain physical changes had also been wrought. Thus does the astral find expression through the material. It is a truth that is little understood by the majority, that our physical characteristics are expressed in the astral before they become visible in the material.

I began to have an uncontrollable desire to visit my former home and renew my companionship with my wife. My astral wanderings on the night I had found the tramp's body had taken me a long distance from home. One can travel immeasurably longer distances when unencumbered by the physical body than when they are so hampered, and I now realized that I was once more subject to my former limitations.

Time and space are so differently sensed by astral dwellers than by those of the material plane that I found it difficult for a time to adjust myself again to earthly conditions. I had traveled long distances with almost the rapidity of thought, never considering the localities I passed through. Mental concentration on the point I had wished to arrive at had been the prime requisite in reaching it. Now I must submit to the limitations of the flesh.

I was even dependent on an atlas to locate myself and learn the distance to my former home and the most direct route by which to reach it. I found it to be several hundred miles distant, and as I was short of cash, the means of covering the distance proved a genuine dilemma. I was determined, however, to let no obstacle deter me from my purpose; so obtaining a wheel, I set out.

At the end of the first day's journey, tired, hungry, and covered with dust, I stopped at an inviting-looking cottage on the outskirts of a village. It was here that I received one of the surprises of my life.

A man who was the physical counterpart of myself sat on the veranda, smoking. When he saw me, his pipe dropped, breaking in a dozen pieces, and with a bound he reached my side. I had barely dismounted from my wheel before he grabbed my hand.

"Why Dave, old boy," he cried; "can it be you back home once more? Nellie!" he shouted to a woman standing in the doorway. "You remember Dave, my twin brother who ran away from home ten years ago?"

"Of course I do," she replied, hastening to my side and grasping one hand, while the man held the other in a vicelike grip.

"But I am not your brother," I protested. Whereupon they looked at one another wonderingly. Then, turning to me, they began to ply me with questions.

"Aren't you David Lawrence? Don't you remember me, your brother John?"

"No, I am James Rogers, and I never saw you before."

"Oh, David, don't you remember father and mother? They were nearly heartbroken when you went away!"

"No. I guess you must have mistaken your man."

"Have you been ill? Have you lost your memory?"

"Not that I know of."

They looked at each other knowingly and at me pityingly. I realized my resemblance to the man before me, and it dawned upon me that he was probably a brother of the tramp whose body I was parading in. They evidently considered this a case of mental aberration, and, naturally I could not very well explain the situation. I decided that the best thing I could do was to let them think as they pleased.

I was invited into the house and my needs ministered to with the tenderness one naturally shows to loved ones suffering from illness or misfortune. I had planned to spend the night here and press on in the morning, but a conversation I overheard after retiring changed my plans.

"Poor Dave," the man was saying; "he has lost his memory entirely, hasn't he? He doesn't seem to recall a thing that occurred before he left home; and

either doesn't remember or doesn't care to tell what he's been doing since. I'm afraid it's the latter, for he was pretty wild and dissipated before he went away."

"I've read of such cases," said the woman; "but sometimes they are cured if they have the right treatment."

"We must lose no time. Dr. Richards, the noted specialist on mental diseases, shall be consulted in the morning if we can get an appointment with him. I think we should send Dave to the doctor's private sanatorium, if we can arrange to do so."

And so they talked and planned until I began to think I had best make good my escape while I could.

Accordingly I dressed quietly, and slipping cautiously to the window, dropped to the ground, found my wheel, and made a hasty exit from the town. Weary as I was, I put many miles between myself and my host before morning dawned. The remainder of my journey was uneventful.

## IV.

I CAN never voice the sensations that surged through me as I walked through the streets of my home town and saw the familiar faces and friends and acquaintances, not one of whom gave me a glance of recognition or a word of greeting. Rip Van Winkle's plight was no more unhappy than mine, neither was it more unique.

Before my departure on that ıtal astral trip I had held an important clerical position with the leading business firm of the town. It was my desire to regain this, but naturally there were serious difficulties in the way. I could not present the required credentials, or prove that by education or experience I was fitted for it.

I learned that the place had never been satisfactorily filled since my going away, and I determined to use every power I possessed to regain it. After repeated efforts I succeeded in getting my former employer's consent to take the place on trial.

I took up the work with such surprising readiness and showed such a thorough knowledge of its details and requirements, that I proved a constant source of astonishment to all connected with the business. Many times they would remark: "I could almost believe it to be Jim back again!"

As weeks went by I found repeated opportunities to meet my wife. But, daughter of Eve that she was, she was interested in another man! Believing me dead, she had accepted his attentions, and their friendship had apparently ripened into love.

I was desperate. Was I to be thwarted in my aim to be reunited to my wife, after all the struggles I had made to attain that end? My efforts to win her attention, to say nothing about her affections, were unavailing. My rival was too firmly entrenched.

In sheer desperation I one day called at her home, forced my presence upon her, and attempted to relate my experiences from the day I left her. I believe I could have impressed her with the truth of my story if I had been left to myself. I intended to prove my identity by telling many of the little incidents of our life together which no one else knew about; but I was abruptly and unceremoniously interrupted by her lover, who appeared at an inopportune moment.

My wife had become so overwrought by my story and by my close resemblance in many ways to my old self, that she was nearly overcome with fright and emotion. This angered my rival to such an extent that he caused me to be arrested and examined to determine my sanity.

I tried to interest the alienists in my strange experience, but only defeated my own ends, as my story evidently convinced them that I was not in a proper mental condition to be at large.

I was therefore sent to an asylum, where I remained for some time before I could convince the medical board that I was sane.

It was during this period that I pre-

pared a story of my strange experience, which I succeeded in getting published. It fell into my wife's hands and she became convinced of the truth of it. Then it was that, through her untiring efforts, I was liberated from the asylum and we were remarried. Not, however, until I had solemnly promised to try no more astral experiments.

This pledge I was willing enough to make, as my bitter experiences had convinced me that while one is occupying his earthly body and living his mundane life, his wisest course is to content himself with living it as normally as possible.

I believed that at last I had found peace, after my eventful and troublous experiences, and I proposed to settle down and enjoy life serenely. But I reckoned without my host. A complication of affairs I had never dreamed possible wound their entangling web around me, and I was caught in their snare.

One day as I was coming home from the office a fine-appearing woman met me, and with astonishment written all over her face uttered one word:

"David!"

Remembering my former experience, the word spoken so intently struck a chill to my heart, and a strange foreboding, a premonition of more trouble, took hold of me.

"Who are you?" I inquired, as nonchalantly as I could.

"You know very well who I am. It is hardly possible that you have forgotten your wife Agnes, whom you left so suddenly ten years ago."

Then she broke down and began weeping so bitterly that I was moved to pity.

"Oh, David," she said brokenly, "why did you desert me so? I have loved you all these years, and have been faithful to you."

"But I am not David," I protested, "and if I were, rest assured I would never desert so charming a woman as you are."

My gallantry seemed to have but slight effect.

"Not David? Oh, but you *are* David! Why do you deny it? Why, there is the scar across your left cheek that you got the day we climbed Mount Pisgah together, a few weeks before we were married! Don't you remember falling and cutting that ugly gash, and how I dressed the wound, binding it with strips torn from my own clothing? Don't say again that you are not David!"

Here was a dilemma, indeed! Evidently Tramp David had a wife, and she was about to claim me for her own. The idea would not have been so terrible had I not such binding claims in another quarter. I put on as bold a front as possible under the circumstances.

"Madam," I said sternly, "I regret to pain you, but this is evidently a case of mistaken identity. There are many such. It is not so unusual as you imagine. From your words and actions I gather that I bear a striking resemblance to your husband, who, you say, has deserted you. As for myself, I am James Rogers, an employee of the Jones & Matthews Company over there. My wife is waiting supper for me, so I must bid you good evening." I touched my hat and turned to go.

With all the anger and bitterness of years concentrated into one moment of time she turned on me.

"Scoundrel! Traitor!" she hissed. "You would add insult to years of bitter injury, would you? You *are* my husband, and you shall suffer a thousandfold what I have suffered through you. Remember, you shall pay the penalty!"

I was greatly disturbed, for I knew not for what sins of Tramp Dave's I might be called upon to answer. Even now I was facing a queer mix-up.

I went home and told my wife what had happened, and together we conjectured as to the strange incident and its probable outcome. But our suspense was short, for I was soon in the hands of officers, arrested on a charge of bigamy.

I was taken back to the town where I had chanced to call at the home of the tramp's brother while on my journey home. There I was arraigned in court.

The odds were all against me. Many people testified that I was David Lawrence, and the former life of the man in whose body I stood at the bar of justice was reviewed in all its black details. I blushed for shame at the record. He had indeed been the black sheep of an otherwise white flock.

He had at last become a parasite on society, an outcast from among his fellow townsmen. He had not been heard from in ten years, but was probably making an effort to reach his old home when death overtook him. Surely if I could have known his dark history, I might have hesitated before appropriating his body to my own use! But here I was, and I must pay the penalty for his sins.

Even the brother's testimony, much as he would have liked to help me, proved damaging, for he identified me as his brother, and told of my visit at his home and of my sudden departure.

I was given a prison sentence for bigamy, and, of course, could not escape serving it. The woman who brought the final trouble upon me finally decided that I was utterly worthless, and, very sensibly and much to my satisfaction, secured a divorce. When at last I walked out of prison a free man, my long-suffering wife took me back once more. Her woes in my behalf had indeed been many.

I am broken in health and in spirit; a man old before my time. One word of caution I offer in closing this weird tale. To whoever may attempt to investigate the occult, let him not carry his researches beyond the border-line where the red sign of danger is flaunted, lest the fate overtake him unawares that befell myself—the Astral Gentleman.

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# THE MAIDEN'S PRAYER

BY SAM DAVIS

ALTHOUGH a bit gay, I'd not have you believe
That a woman should carry her heart in her sleeve.
And I know I'm in order when merely asserting
That a lady should never be guilty of flirting.
But still there's a time when flirtation's no sin,
If the right fellow chucks you under the chin

Of course you all know there's comparative danger
In meeting a man, a comparative stranger,
Who makes your acquaintance in galloping haste—
Who fondles your fingers and circles your waist.
But still there's a time when love *must* begin,
If the right fellow chucks you under the chin.

Of course, my good people, you're perfectly sure
That I am a lady, discreet and demure.
I'm never with frivolous levity laden,
But pose as the prim, Puritanical maiden.
But still—with a chance of a husband to win,
Some good fellow *might* chuck me under the chin!

# The Gem Vampire

by Elmer Brown Mason

Author of "Black Butterflies," "Red Tree-Frogs," etc.

ON June 24, 1916, we published a novelette called "Black Butterflies," which was followed, on August 12, 1916, with its sequel, "Red Tree-Frogs." Those who were fortunate enough to read both these stories will be sure to appreciate the opportunity given them to follow Andy Freeman once again upon an adventure that transcends anything he has done before. If by any chance you have *not* met Andy Freeman, it's high time you did.—THE EDITOR.

## CHAPTER I.

### SHANGHAING "THE HONORABLE ARCHIE."

I, ANDY FREEMAN, a Scotchman, and therefore cautious with words, will not say that I was not content with life. All day long I mounted and identified butterflies and moths in the British Museum, receiving, at the end of the month, a fat check, the greater part of which I cannily banked.

Nor will I say that there were not periods when I heard the call of the far-off Bornean jungle, sometimes faintly, sometimes roaring as loudly in my ears as the night noises of bird, beast, and insect in that distant, wet, and sweltering land.

More than once I was on the point of going back—back to the great hush of dripping bamboo thickets, twisted lianas, mighty trees with their mysteries of living things 'neath leaf and bark, or roaming through the airy world of their lofty summits.

Then, when the longing was in me so strongly that I fair ached, I used to go down to the water-front where the ships from the East docked. Down there an evil old Scotchman kept an inn where congregated captains and mates in the private rooms back of the bar, and sailors in the bar itself.

'Twas not the kind of a public house where you would care to take your aunt or even your mother-in-law. The proprietor, McFane, was a crimp and, what is worse, believed in the doctrine of original sin, but 'twas the one place where I could steep myself in the gossip of the Bornean coasts, hear of whom and what came out of the jungles.

Then, after a bout with McFane over religion—he was an unreasonable arguer and we fair hated one another—I would go back to my butterflies well content for the time being.

You may ask, since I have neither wife nor bairns, kin or ties, why I did not plunge back into the old life of collecting

in the hot, Eastern jungles. The answer is the Honorable Archie Lommond.

Losh, but yon was a wild laddie!

And yet, though you could not call him good in any meaning of the word, he was not a bad one. Life to him was a great, ever new fairing, something to be laughed at, played with, then tossed away. He was overfond of liquor, he was overfond of women, he was overfond of cards, his joke was always carried to the end no matter how bitter it might be to t'other man, and the way he scattered siller was a fair shame and disgrace.

But the manner in which he did everything was what saved him from being wicked. He thirsted for life, every part of it; all was play to him, glorious day-long, week-long, year-long play, no more serious than castle bairns build upon the sands to be swept away by the ocean waves.

Till his majority Lord Lommond, his father, a dour old man, always held him close. The trouble was—though it's fair sacrilegious to compare any one of his great name to a beast—the trouble was with him that, like the puppy with which Kipling begins a sad tale, he had been kept away from eating soap until his teeth were full-grown. As a puppy, mind ye well, he would have eaten a little and have been a wee bit sick; as a full-grown, young dog he ate more and should have been very sick indeed. The wonder of it was that he was not.

You see I was bound, in a way of speaking, to keep an eye on him. My grandfather had been gamekeeper to the old lord's father; my father had been gamekeeper to the old lord himself, and, in the natural course of events, I should have been in charge of the coverts at Castle Lommond.

However, the matter of a difference of opinion between me and a young dominie on a point of religion intervened. His collar-bone, two ribs, and one arm were broken, and his skull fractured—'twas because the arguments advanced were not fair—and I found it expedient to leave the country for a time. Nevertheless, I felt bound to the family, and the best manner in which I could manifest this was in keeping track of the Honorable Archie.

'Twas not an overdifficult matter. The lad was fond of me and would often come to my rooms when his great friends wearied him—when he had done something unusually outrageous, or was short of siller—he always paid me back. Then I would chide him for his sins while he laughed at me, or tell him tales of the jungle until the murky London morning peeped in blowsily through the dirty shutters and the bottle on the table between us was dry. Still more concerning him I got from the papers and from gossip. 'Twas:

**YOUNG ARISTOCRAT PAYS FINE IN BOW STREET FOR PUTTING TWO CABBIES AND A BOBBY *HORS DE COMBAT.***

**RUMORED MARRIAGE OF SCION OF NOBLE SCOTCH FAMILY TO THE PRETTIEST GIRL IN THE BALLET.**

**THE HONORABLE ARCHIE LOMMOND LEADS COTILLION.**

Gossip told most and worst. There were two, three-day-long bouts at cards in which he won enormously or lost even greater sums; the affair of the Russian woman he stole from a grand duke; the French dancer of whom he robbed one of the richest Jews in the world.

My, oh, my, but he would only have the best of everything, and the restlessness of youth, the joy of living was strong, strong in him. What man could be angry when he laughed, throwing back his head and giving himself up to the joy of it; what woman could resist his smile, or look unmoved on the beauty of him, the splendid six-foot stretch of his young body, the mouth like a baby's, the eyes

with the damn-the-world recklessness shooting out from their blue depths.

If ever man was king among his fellows he was that man, taking what he pleased, and then discarding it as easily and as thoughtlessly.

But there was an end to it all—yes, there was an end. And the manner of it was passing strange.

The Gem Woman came to London from God, or the devil, knows where!

She did an act at Covent Garden, and such an act! Three times she walked the length of the stage, and three times she smiled. That was all. But that smile was the most wonderful thing I have ever seen.

Talk about the Mona Lisa's smile! The Gem Woman's held all the knowledge of wickedness, all the knowledge of pain, every promise of delight since the world began. And the way she was dressed was fair heathen: gems, nothing but gems from head to foot.

Pearls, rows upon rows of them, clothed the upper part of her body—she was a big woman—her girdle was of ruddy rubies, her skirt of emeralds, sapphires, and diamonds. Diamonds winked and blinked in her hair, and her fingers were loaded with them to the tips.

There were rumors of grand dukes, princes, even kings who had showered her with these precious stones, but nothing really definite. She was a complete mystery, kept herself a mystery, dwelt in a tiny house on the outskirts of the city guarded by two enormous, black Nubian mutes, and was never seen but on the stage.

London went fair mad over her.

It was not to be expected that the Honorable Archie would refuse the challenge of mystery and of a beautiful woman. It appealed to his wild recklessness, and to all the joy of deep quaffing youth within him. How he met her is a mixed tale of audacity—the knocking senseless of one of her Nubians, a play of boldness and wit that smacked of the raiding buccaneer and of the diplomat.

The night it was done he came to me and told me of it; told me with his throat full of laughter and his eyes sparkling like a thousand sunbeams.

"She is a cat, Andy," he ended the tale. "A lioness, but none the less a cat—a great, beautiful, feline thing with yellow eyes. Cold as the icebergs of the North, hard as the gems with which she decks herself, and, oh, dour Scotchman, virtuous as the virgin seas about the pole; passionless, loving nothing in the world but silly, bright stones. But she is something new, new, new! The world has never seen her like before."

"Man, man, are ye sure she is no' an evil woman?" I asked doubtfully. "She looks to me like the very heart of wickedness itself. Will ye no' be burning your fingers, laddie!"

"Sure, no one surer than I," he laughed an answer to my question, throwing back his splendid, young head. "As for burning my fingers, they are cold, these days, and will need a lot of warming."

I'll not trace in detail the days that followed. How his laughter gradually died, how he spent more and more time with me away from his former great companions, all the time, in fact, that he was not with her in the yellow, silk-hung room where she received him. And he drank—losh, how he did drink! Quarts of yellow Scotch—'twas like her eyes, he said. I am no foe to drink myself, but the way he played with it was fair appalling.

"Do you love yon yellow woman?" I dared to ask him once, my right hand ready to guard should he take my question amiss.

It didn't bother him, though. We were in a private room of McFane's low public house, and he lay back in his chair for a long time without speaking. Then he gulped down his liquor and looked at me.

"I think not, Andy," he answered thoughtfully. "But I don't know. I wish I had never seen her. She dares me on, some way. She promises nothing,

and, indeed, I want nothing from her. She dares me on—and I do not know to what! I have bought her gems until I am fair strapped just to see the coldness in her eyes die for one, short breath. And she seems to desire nothing in the world but more stones—is set on a chaplet of yellow diamonds for her hair, a chaplet that exists only in her imagination."

We sat silent for a while, both lost in our thoughts. Little did I care what sins the boy committed in the full-blooded swing of his youth, but I didna want him hurt. And this cold, mysterious woman was sapping the joy of life out of him.

Came an interruption. There was an uproar from the captains' room back of the bar, and the lad sprang to his feet.

"Come on, Andy," he begged eagerly, "there may be a fight we can get into. I need a counter-irritant to this continuous love-making that I do not mean."

There was a fight. A little man—he was captain of a big, iron tramp steamer plying between Sumatra, Borneo, and London—was entrenched behind a table, a bottle by way of club in either hand. One lad lay on the floor before him, and the six other occupants of the room were preparing to make a rush.

"Come on, ye disbelievin' cowards!" he yelled. "I tell ye I have seen an elephant covered with diamonds from trunk to tail—yellow diamonds that gleamed like marigolds in the sun."

"Damn yer diamonds an' yer lies," spoke one. "What do I care what ye have seen or not seen! Ye spilled my drink," and he lunged forward only to go flat before the Honorable Archie's fist.

Now, wasn't it a fool thing! In a moment we were all mixed up in a senseless, vicious fight, no man knowing the reason thereof. McFane helped untangle it—with the loaded end of a billiard-cue—and we dragged the little captain into our own private room.

"They wouldn't believe me," he kept sobbing, being far gone in drink, "and I told the God's truth! I told them what I meant to keep secret until I had the money to go back and get the diamonds myself. I told them the God's truth, the God's truth! 'Twas off the coast of northern Borneo, and I saw it with my glasses. An elephant decked from its trunk to his silly tail with yellow diamonds. The truth, the truth, the truth, the livin' truth! A secret I told them, and they wouldn't believe me!"

We quieted the little captain as best we could—which meant with more liquor—and had McFane put him to bed before we left.

The Honorable Archie was fair cheerful as he walked toward my rooms, where he was to sleep.

"Yellow diamonds seem to have become an obsession with me lately," he laughed. "I'm beginning to feel they are to play an important part in my destiny."

I said nothing. A brine-roughened fist had taken all the skin off my nose, and I did not care to trust myself to speech.

The next evening Archie did not come to me, and, leaving a note on my door telling that I would be later at McFane's, I slipped out into the night.

The heart was heavy within me over the lad, and, at the same time, I was burning with the curse of the jungle. It seemed as though I *must* get back to the great mysteries of unexplored places, the drip and hum of steaming, wet wilderness. And what was to hinder me! There were a hundred ships ready to bear me away from the London fog.

I was walking up Bond Street, with its treasure-laden shops, their glitter doubly enhanced by the false night radiance. A crowd stood in my way and I pushed through it, paused at the edge to glance over shoulders into the window.

There, below a photograph of the Gem Woman, spread out on black velvet as though flung down carelessly, was a headdress of yellow diamonds, dozens of them linked together by spidery, gold chains.

The price-card showed the figures—sixty-thousand pounds—sheer sinfulness to think of so much siller for a woman's gaud!

McFane greeted me dourly. The little captain—Lamb was his name—had raved the night through, and was only to be quieted by more drink, the cause of his ravings.

"Man was born wicked," said McFane—his doctrine of original sin again, mind ye—"and I will not have yon seafarer die on my hands. Do you go in to him and see what you can do since you have already foolishly befriended him."

Then and there I would have well liked to argue the theological point with that evil Scotchman, but it seemed best to attend to the little man first. I found him in very bad shape, as badly off as he could be and yet be sane, if sane he were.

His mind held nothing but the wild tale of the night before, and he insisted on repeating it to me time and time again. Also he was all for having me join him and return to Borneo; promised me half of all he got. I humored him, of course, and, sending out for bromids, got him, at last, to sleep.

Down-stairs, where I had gone looking for McFane so as to try, for the last time, to put him right on the question of original sin, I had a real shock. Having just left a crazy man, a still crazier burst in upon me.

And 'twas the Honorable Archie.

Losh, losh, but the boy was fair mad! His eyes were cold blazing, his lips drawn back from his teeth, his face and hands twitching like a lady's fan.

"Andy, I must have a thousand pounds to-night," he gasped. "Your check will do, but I must have a thousand pounds! And I shall not pay it back for a year, if ever."

"I care little when you pay," I answered, "though it's a lot of siller; but what ails you, laddie? Why must you have it to-night?"

"I'll tell you later," he answered, "but now"—banging his great fist down on the table—"give me the check—not crossed, made out to me personally. Then wait for me here."

I wrote the bit of paper wonderingly and handed it to him. Fair snatching it, he was gone, and there was the roar of a motor outside as it jumped straight into "high."

He was not away long. Before I reached twenty-firstly in my argument with McFane, the door of the private room opened and the Honorable Archie strode in. He was a lad transformed, and, as I gazed at him in wonderment, he threw back his head and laughed in quite the old way, laughed as though there were no such thing as care in the whole world.

"Get out, McFane, you and your 'releegon,'" he commanded. "I have to talk to friend Freeman."

I sat and waited. The laddie poured himself half a tumbler of the yellow whisky, swallowed it raw at one gulp, and, at that very moment, I saw beneath the surface. The laughter had not been real; he was playing a part, acting with an iron grip upon himself, but, nevertheless, acting.

Again he half-filled the tumbler and again drank. Then he spoke:

"To begin with, Andy, you get your thousand pounds next year, not before, but you do get it then. I have spent seventeen thousand in the last month for gems, and swore to myself I would spend no more. This is different, though. There is a wonderful diamond thing, God's curse on it, and Leonora has seen it. It is—"

"I know, I know," I interrupted. "Saw it, price and all, in a Bond Street window."

He looked at me curiously, then continued:

"She has gone mad for it, actually mad. Swears she must have it; the man who gives it to her may ask anything—and I want nothing of her," he interjected grimly. "She threatened to take it from another man, a man who writes her every day, sends her amethysts—she hates amethysts—but whom she has never

seen. I have not, shall probably never have sixty thousand pounds, but I did the next best. Your check bought a six-months' option on that yellow jewel thing."

Once more he tipped whisky into the tumbler, and once more he drank while I stared at him open-mouthed.

"But what is the object of it all, laddie," I asked gently. "You do not want yon—yon female."

"True," he agreed dully, "but—no—other—man—shall—have—her. 'Twould—'twould—make—me—feel—beaten."

He groped for the whisky, swayed where he sat, and his head thumped down upon the table. Mightily he strove to rouse himself; then, with a long, tired sigh, relaxed and slept.

Losh! but there followed mad days and still madder nights! I doubt me if the laddie were once sober during all this time, though he was not, in a manner of speaking, exactly drunk, either. His great friends knew him no more; all his time he spent with me when he was not in the yellow silk-hung room with that cat woman. Nor did his humor change. He played at being his old, joyous self, played the part so well that I doubt me would any other man have fathomed the falseness of it save me who loved him.

The situation in regard to the yellow diamond gaud remained unchanged. No one could buy it for six months, not until his option expired. I asked what he would do then, and he laughed back at me that he did not know. I even suggested he take another thousand pounds—which would leave me still one—and try to win the whole sixty with it in some rich gambling club.

The idea caught him, at first, being mad enough, but then he shook his head, always laughing, and refused. One evening he told me that he thought he would marry the beautiful, feline woman, just to draw her claws, he said; the next he claimed that rather would he die.

I'll not say the lad lied to me when he maintained that he did not love that gem vampire. Indeed I know there were times when he fair hated her. But she was his master, fascinated him, the strangeness of her had woven bonds about him from which I doubt me he could have freed himself had he really tried.

There were times when they quarreled frightfully, but he always held the jeweled head-dress before her eyes. No one could give it to her for six long months save he. Thus they really fought one another from day to day, two mighty wills each striving to conquer t'other.

The whole thing was beyond me and made me suffer, for I could see through the lad's mask to the unhappiness beneath. Finally he began to break, and the sight of it drove me fair mad. The light went from his eyes; not only his hands, but his whole body trembled, and, worst of all, he began to talk to himself as though I were not there. Disjointed sentences—sparks from the anvil of wit—one of the two was always striving to dazzle t'other.

Drink had its part in it, I'll not deny, but not so much as the woman. I drank drop for drop with him and it didn't touch me; and yet perhaps it did—was half responsible for the wild plan I conceived to try and make my laddie whole from that she vampire.

You'll recall Lamb, the little captain of the iron tramp steamer that plied between London and the East. Well, he fell very sick after his drinking bout, and I looked after him. 'Twas a full month before he was on his feet again—cursing all liquor—and a cargo had offered itself.

I told him the story of his ravings of elephants clothed in diamonds, and he laughed at me, but begged, for his reputation's sake, that I say no more about it. Also he was fair grateful for any one not a Scotchman, and 'twas to him I turned in my trouble.

My plan was simply no less than to kidnap the lad, take him to sea on a long trip so to draw him away from the frightful magnet of the woman.

The matter was easy to arrange. We had fallen into the habit of spending nearly all the night at McFane's, and many a lad has been shanghaied from there. It was agreed it should take place the very evening Lamb sailed. When I raised my voice and said "Lord help us!" six men were to break in the door of our private room—I wanted to be sure we would be enough—bind him and me, and put us on the tramp.

Well at sea and off the trade route, when there was no chance for us to put back in a small boat, Lamb was to release us, and the matter be explained that we had been truly shanghaied, but put, by mistake, upon the wrong ship. It was a well-conceived plan, and I took credit to myself for it.

Archie was in one of his blackest moods that evening, and had left the Gem Woman early to join me at McFane's; also he talked more to himself than me. It seems that she had begun to doubt he intended to buy the sixty-thousand-pound gaud at all, and so accused him. Nor would he say no nor yes to her questions. There had been a cold, black quarrel, ending by her demanding that he surrender his option to another man, and he refused.

"She looked like a cat-devil"—he spoke the words to himself—"one of those mythological creatures, half woman and half fiend, that clawed the souls of men down into hell. I thought she would kill me when she reached that Malay kris from off the wall — and the feline grace of her as she came toward me! I laughed at her, laughed up into her face, and yet I believe I came nearer to loving her then than ever before, should have truly loved her had she stuck that blade into my flesh. But she must plead and kiss, her lips as cold as those cursed stones she wears. Leonora as a lioness fascinates; as a pleading woman, no!"

Would it not turn a man's blood cold to listen to such rantings, and was it not fair unnatural, wicked!

He drew the bottle to him and filled his glass.

"Lord help us!" I exclaimed, raising high my voice.

But I had overplayed caution. There were too many men in the little room, they hindered one another. Those told off to the task pinioned me against the wall while I made show of resisting.

As the Honorable Archie turned, half rising, he swung the bottle of whisky against the first man's jaw, putting him permanently out of the struggle. The next he caught to him, twisting his arm back so the fellow spun around face away, forming a shield against the remaining twain. Another went down to a blow impacting on his cheek-bone with the snap of a whip, and the fourth turned coward and broke out through the open door.

With a heave, the Honorable Archie twisted the man whom he held over on his face, and I heard the crack of a collar-bone.

It was all over in a moment, and Archie was leaping upon the two that held me. One broke away, not trying to hit, just guarding, the other flung his hands high above his head, yelling out:

"Don't 'it me, guv'nor, don't 'it me! This bloomin' Scotty 'ired us for to do you. 'E done it, guv'nor, 'e done it!"

The lad pushed him from the room, leaned back against the table, and laughed till the place shook with the roar of it—laughed at me, into my face, while I glowered at him.

"What was the idea, Andy!" he managed to choke out in the midst of his mirth. "What was the idea?"

"A fool plan, and a fool who planned it," I answered sulkily. "It was in my mind to save you from hell, but now you may gang your ain gait. Go back to yon female cat, I'll have no more to do with you."

He pushed the bell for the waiter, and, paying no attention to the man's startled looks at the wreck of the place, ordered another bottle of yellow whisky.

"New chairs and new glasses also," he added.

We needed them, too.

"Well," he reflected aloud, "it is not such a bad plan. I *am* in hell; the joy seems to have somehow gone out of life. It will make Leonora wonder—and the head-dress is safe for the present. She will not dare to ask another man for it."

Then to me:

"Lead on, Andy; I can't refuse a friend. You may shanghai me—peacefully."

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## CHAPTER II.

### "THEM."

IN the morning we were far out at sea, and what a contrast with the dirty, foggy city! The sunlight danced on the waves, a square sail set amidships to help the old engines caught and held the brine-scented breeze; everything smelled fresh and new and clean.

It was not alone the physical atmosphere that had undergone a change. There was an extraordinary mental shift within us, the final impetus to which was given by the sea blossoming of little Captain Lamb. Losh, but he was a different man from the liquor-soaked wreck I had befriended at McFane's low saloon. The initiative of this change manifested itself the first thing in the morning when the Honorable Archie asked for a drink.

"There's brandy in the medicine-chest to be used in case of sickness, Mr. Lommond," answered the captain, "but no other drop of the filthy stuff on board. And ye'll address me as captain, not Lamb, in future. I may be Lamb on shore, but I am not at sea."

He wasn't. He was more, in a manner of speaking, a lion, and a very touchy one at that.

I thought, at first, that there would be trouble. Really the boy needed a drink. He had been soaked in it so long that I was afeared the abrupt cutting off would hurt him, if not his body, at least his temper. I was wrong.

The sudden assumption of dignity by the small captain amused him mightily, and being denied something, he to whom nothing on earth had hitherto been refused, was a new experience that tickled him.

At any rate, he made no objection, and turned his attention, since always he must be busy at something, to learning the routine of our rusty old tramp from stoking to navigation—no difficult task for a laddie raised on Loch Lomond.

On shore I had felt a certain amount of contempt for Captain Lamb as a man who could not handle his liquor; at sea 'twas quite different. The way he bulldozed his crew was a fair revelation in efficiency.

The riffraff of the world go down to the sea in tramp steamers, and riffraff is no easy matter to handle.

The twenty-three men who made up the crew of the Sarawak Queen—such was the name gold-lettered on the stern of our iron ship—were, including the two mates, the poorest human beings I had ever seen, veritable scum of the seven seas. 'Twas like scum the sailors were treated, too, by First Mate Smith and Second Mate Liberman, and the mates received no better from the captain.

He was the kind of a little man who believes in keeping those under him down and afraid, and he certainly lived up to his beliefs. 'Twas a pleasant voyage, none the less, and we went swiftly.

The weather held bonny all down through the Mediterranean and into the Suez Canal. There Archie mailed a letter to the gem woman. He had also sent her one before he left London, so he told me. We ran into the tail of a storm in the shallow Red Sea, and the Sarawak Queen behaved very badly; then slipped out into the Indian Ocean, around Point de Galle, touched at Singapore—Archie sent off another letter—whence we squared off for Brunei on the coast of northern Borneo.

Losh, but I was a happy man that day! India was sinking fast astern; my lad, to all appearances cured of his madness, was steering the ship; the sky was dead blue,

the sea inky black and smooth as though oiled; the breath of the East was in my nostrils, and Captain Lamb stood on the bridge cursing the second mate down into Gehenna, farther beneath to Tophet, and across the fires of hell itself. 'Twas fair poetical. And then I realized that the mate was answering the little man back.

That was something he could not endure. I saw him leave the bridge feet foremost in a flying leap—a very efficient manner for a small man to land on a larger—and next I heard two distinct snaps like the breaking of dry sticks. I ran forward with some vague idea of picking up what was left of the mate, anyway seeing the fun. He had stepped aside, however, just in time, and was looking down on Lamb, whose left leg and arm sagged loose, broken.

We had a time carrying the captain to his cabin, he not wanting to go, and the names he called me while I was setting his bones were fair scandalous. The worst of it was that he had no recourse against the second mate.

The man had not laid hands on him, and could not be blamed for stepping out of the way. Of course we thought, and I so explained in the kindliest manner to the little man—he nearly exploded—the accident could not have happened at a more fortunate time. It was one straight leg to Borneo, and even the mates, navigators though they were not, should be able to take the ship safe to Brunei.

When we came on deck again it was night, stars shining, but over in the east a dark band across the heavens that kept growing broader and broader. The steamer wallowed through long, calm rollers. It was very hot and far too still; then the storm came.

I'll not attempt to describe it, and I doubt if words could. Not the almighty waves or the shaking of the ship most impressed me; but 'twas the noise. The universe was one great roar of sound so intense that it seemed a solid thing into which the Sarawak Queen bored with long, sickening staggers.

Swiftly the fury worked round to the west behind us, and we were driving before it, the screw turning at quarter speed. Once we sighted land and swung away from it, lost our sense of direction so we even distrusted the compass. The little captain, lashed in his bunk, suffered agonies and swore accordingly. The mates were helpless with fear; I was ghastly seasick; the Honorable Archie ran the ship.

Four days we drove on, and the morning of the fifth the shaft whirled off the propeller into the deep, and we flung out sea-anchor after sea-anchor only to have them ruthlessly torn away. The sixth day the storm ended in one last burst of fury, breaking loose and caving in our water-casks, and left us dragging over a still angry sea along a low, marshy coast. Nor could you deceive me in regard to that shore line; I had seen it too often.

It was the coast of northern British Borneo.

We had no drop of fresh water on board, and the sea was yet too high to attempt a landing in a small boat. For one entire day and a long night we swung at a constantly dragging anchor, before the waves suddenly fell, smoothed out flat as they do in the tropics.

It takes trouble to bring out what men are. We were all parched with thirst and worn out with the rack of the storm. The captain slept through the pure weariness of pain; the mates were useless, still afraid though all danger was now past; and the crew were a huddle of wet, weary, nerve-broken rats—all save one.

Bob he was called—he had no other name—the smallest man on board, but with the heart of Napoleon. During the storm it was really he who directed the launching of the sea-anchors and acted as the Honorable Archie's right-hand man. I had done what I could, of course, but 'twas little enough because, losh, losh, oh losh, how sick I was!

As for my laddie, in his proper element he had fought, struggled, drunk with the

glory of the storm, singing—which he could not.

We were thankful men who launched a boat over the side, filled it with all the small water breakers, and rowed toward the shore. There was fear in my heart, however, though I kept it to myself. You see, I knew that coast. The marshes flooded by the tides often ran miles inland, and fresh water was rare and far between. Our only hope was that we be lucky enough to strike a river.

'Twas a weary row for weary men. We found a channel through the sand-bar across which the breakers broke, but once on the smooth surface inside were in no better plight. Swamp—nothing but swamp—stretched before us; and there was no sign of fresh water, no break in the line of mangroves, lush grass, scrubby palmetto growth, and it was hot, hot, hot!

Men sank down in their seats through thirst and exhaustion, only to be lashed back to a semblance of effort by the virulent tongue of Bob, the tiny wharf-rat. Finally I saw an even lusher growth ahead, higher trees and of more species, and, on the chance, ordered that we push through.

It was a hard job for exhausted men forcing the heavy boat into the tangle of tropical growth; but we were clear at last, floating on a sand-bordered inlet from which a channel stretched inland. I dipped my fingers, carried them dripping to my lips. The water was fresh, holding but a suggestion of the salt of the sea.

"'Oly, bloomin' saints!" cried Bob from the bow, and pointed.

Slowly, majestically, five great elephants moved out of the jungle and stood on the sand in a line, trunks swinging. And such elephants! Each separate beast was painted in barbarically brilliant colors.

The first and largest wore on its forehead an enormous cap that glistened with jewels; around its belly was a two-foot-broad band of gold, and the body was smeared with moons of crimson and yellow; another was raked from tail to trunk with wavy lines of green; a third blotched like a bird's egg with splotches of purple; the fourth streaked up and down with red; and the last, most unbelievable of the extraordinary quintet, was stained a staring white over which was flung a net of gold sparkling and flashing at every knot with a gleaming yellow stone!

Sitting on the beast's head, legs beneath the ears, was a nude, long-haired man crowned with jasmine, an iron elephant goad poised on his hip.

Gazing, we sat silent, motionless, as though under a spell, a spell that was fearfully broken. Rising in the waist of the boat, a sailor gibbered, for a breath, like a jungle ape, then plunged over the side, the water closing over him. Nor did he reappear. A score of sharks' fins that jiggered sank near us.

"Anything may be true," spoke the Honorable Archie, passing his hand across his eyes to clear away the vision were it not real, then looking again, "or else we all have delirium tremens through lack of drink the same as Lamb had 'em through liquor at McFane's."

One by one the boat's crew discovered that the water on which we floated was drinkable and were sucking it up from their cupped hands.

As I stared and stared at the savage on the white elephant's head a memory glimmered within me, crystallized, and I knew. Scrambling up on my seat, I called out in the Ida'an tongue:

"Son of Kratas and Dillingame *tuan*, son of the priestess of the Land of Blood, 'tis I, Freeman *tuan*, who greets you!"

The nude figure on the elephant's neck turned in our direction with the lightning quickness and grace of a striking reptile.

"Freeman *tuan*, Freeman *tuan*," he shouted. "I remember, I remember! Come from the water to me."

"Are the elephants old school chums of yours, too?" asked Archie.

But I paid no attention to him; ordered "Give way all."

As the boat swept toward the shore the great beasts switched around uneasily, enormous ears cocked forward, but the son of Kratas quieted them with a high-pitched word in some unknown tongue. The keel grated on the sand, and I jumped out to have my hand clasped in both those of the dark, naked savage.

Losh, but yon was a man!

Bred of Kratas, priestess of the Land of Blood, beautiful beyond words, and of my friend Dillingame who had taken her to wife in the heart of Borneo, only to find death with his mate in his arms when her claim to immortality was shattered by a Chinaman's bullet. I had seen him but a boy when I had left the jungle years and years back.

Now, as he stood, his eyes level with my own, smiling at me, he was the embodiment of the teeming life of the tropics, straight, tall, bronzed, strong as a wild beast, supple as a serpent, and never have I dreamed a man could be so utterly beautiful!

We squatted on the sand while he eagerly told me of his life, speaking in the slurring consonants of the Ida'an tongue, and the Honorable Archie, with the sailors grouped behind him, listened with wonder and without understanding. On the shore the five nightmare painted elephants rocked and fidgeted, longing to go into the water yet not daring to move without the word of command.

It was a strange tale in its very baldness and simplicity that the son of Kratas, the savage Bornean priestess, and of Dillingame, the English adventurer, poured out to me. Again it was not strange at all, the most natural thing in the world, if you can visualize the *mise-en-scène* — nightmare colored elephants, virgin tropic wilderness, naked savage crowned with jasmine-blooms.

When Dillingame sought voluntary death, his dead mate in his arms, turning, he had spoken these last words to his son:

"Child of the jungle, go back to the jungle."

And that is exactly what had happened. For a week or two I dwelt with the boy, helping him through his first grief, and then the tropic vastness, with its thousand unsolved mysteries, had gradually claimed him.

He brought me back strange tales of the beasts, the last one dealing with rumor of an elephant, a broad band of gold around its belly. I saw less and less of him, and then I went back—back to England and the British Museum, content (so I told myself) to spend the rest of my days peacefully mounting butterflies far, far from the hush and mystery of Eastern jungles.

After I had left (so he told his tale) the boy moved farther and farther afield, roaming from beneath the shadow of Kinabalu out upon the plain to the north, terra incognita where dwelt not even Bornean savages, sprinkled here and there with small patches of jungle, one great lake during the wet season—if there is any season that may be called dry in that sultry, dripping land.

There he had found "Them," the elephants, beasts imported by the Chinese no one knows how many years ago to Borneo, for they are not native to the soil, and all the rest of his tale dealt with Them. They seemed to absorb all his life, his thoughts.

How he had tamed and conquered the great beasts remained a mystery—he had no words to explain all this. I asked why they were so daubed with colors, and he gave me an answer I could not understand, a medley of words dealing with "the law of the painted walls."

You see, though he knew things in his mind, he had no practise in expressing them through the medium of speech, never had had occasion to correlate a happening with its lingual expression. To my question as to the jeweled net that covered the white elephant, the gem-decked cap upon the largest one, he could give no explanation save that the gauds belonged to Them and had been found among the painted walls.

In spite of his difficulty of expression and the white men grouped around him—I knew he had never seen white men before save his father and me—he was quite unembarrassed, quite without the shadow of fear.

When he was talked out he rose abruptly to his feet, turning to the elephants, and explained: "They must bathe and be made new."

Striding through the group of sailors, who quickly made room for him, he approached the white one and shouted in a high-pitched voice what was plainly a command.

Slowly the beast sank to its fore knees, settled back on its hind ones, then, as he stood before it, raised its trunk on high. Bending, he unhooked two clasps, each guarded by a gigantic yellow diamond as large as my hand, and hauled the golden net from its body, letting it fall carelessly upon the sand, a glittering, gleaming mass blinking golden yellow in the sun.

Losh, losh, but yon was a wondrous thing, and worth the ransom of many kings! Soft gold linked yellow diamonds, a hand's breadth apart, hundreds of them, into a net like a lassie puts over her hair. Every diamond was the shade of marigolds, and not one stone smaller than the largest one in that woman's gaud that was ruining my laddie and had set him off a wandering with me.

I glanced up at the men's faces. The Honorable Archie was gazing at the heap of incalculable wealth, whistling through his teeth, his handsome, reckless face absolutely expressionless; Bob's features were one mask of covetousness; another sailor, a great black Welshman, was licking his lips, sweat standing out on his forehead, his fingers twitching; the others stood as though mesmerized, their faces blank with the stolid lack of understanding of dumb beasts.

Meanwhile the son of Kratas had made the largest elephant kneel and dragged off the jeweled cap from its head. Then, at another word of command, the two elephants rose to their feet, a second shrill call and all five great beasts, trunks raised and trumpeting until the jungle shook with the thunder of it, rushed into the water, the sharks' fins speeding swiftly from the shore.

An odd thought occurred to me as I watched them wallowing in the waves, squirting water from their long trunks like hosemen at a fire—an odd thought which, in a manner of speaking, made me believe I might have been a poet had I not been hard-headed Scotch.

This thought was that the big beasties were muddy continents being washed clean, and thus would come the end of the world. I don't claim it was sentimental, mind ye well, but poetical—in a manner of speaking.

The elephants came shoreward into the shallows, and we could see that most of the barbaric paint had washed away, leaving them wet, clean, dark slate color beneath. There they stood blowing water upon each others' backs, the last decorations quickly fading.

There was an angry shout from behind me: "Stop it, stop it, you dog!" And I turned to see the Honorable Archie sprinting toward where the jeweled cap lay upon the sand. Bending over it, the black Welshman was trying furiously to pry out the jewels with his clasp-knife.

Things happened then with the quickness of a snapping camera shutter.

Before my lad was half-way to the thieving vandal the son of Kratas was upon the Welshman. His hand shot to his neck, jerking him upright; there was a quick snap, snap, snap of breaking bones, and, whirled above the savage's head, twisted, broken, dying if not already dead, he splashed into the water. Never have I dreamed of such mad strength; it was the relentless power of a great machine crushing masses of ore to dust.

"Would ye steal from Them, from *Them?*" shrieked the jungle man, foam on his lips. "Would ye steal from *Them?*"

At my side the sailor Bob plucked at my elbow.

"Shoot 'im, shoot 'im quick, before 'e calls 'is beasts," he implored, "'ow else can we get the bloomin' stones!"

I shook him off and shouted to Archie:

"Get the men to the boat; the elephants are coming ashore!"

They were, indeed, charging from the water in answer to their master's call.

Two sailors who had picked up and were staggering under the weight of the golden net dropped their precious burden and scurried for the water. I knocked a revolver from Bob's hand just as it exploded, and he, too, ran for his life.

"Come on, Andy," called my laddie from the boat, but the terrified men had pushed it off, and I stood alone upon the beach facing the charging elephants and their angry master.

I am a Scotchman, therefore cautious with words; but I'll positively say that I was scared. There seemed no way of escape. I knew I could not outrun the the great beasts, so I just stood there, waiting to be trampled, thoughts of great importance and of no importance at all going through my mind:

Without me yon gem vampire could suck my laddie dry of happiness and siller, unless he killed her, which I hoped he would; Captain Lamb favored purple pajamas, which I considered bad taste; was there a hereafter, and how quickly would I know of it? Would yon murderous savage go to hell or be pardoned because of his ignorance? What a shame I could no' have another bout over religion with that evil McFane!

The son of Kratas suddenly raised his voice, and the elephants halted. He walked slowly up to me and, losh, but it was unbelievable; great tears were running down his cheeks, he whom I had seen tear a man from life with his bare hands!

"Freeman *tuan*," he asked, after the manner of a hurt bairn, "why did they touch that what belonged to Them? It was not of the white men, not theirs; it belonged to Them—to Them! I can prove it by the painted walls."

"I dinna ken," I answered, shaking my head. "I dinna ken. It must be that madness was upon them. I shall take them away and never come back." He studied over this for a moment, then spoke again. "Yes, let them never come back. But you, Freeman *tuan*, you come back. I would show you the painted walls, would have you learn to love Them as I love Them. Should I not be here, the way is plain. I go now," and he turned abruptly and passed on to the elephants.

I watched him drag the golden, diamond-knotted net over the beast that had been white, replace the glittering cap on the largest elephant, and finally disappear in the jungle astride a great gray neck, to disappear without one backward glance.

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## CHAPTER III.

### LEONORA AND MUTINY.

IT was no easy matter to navigate a great clumsy scow of an iron tramp without steam, especially when she has only a blunt stub of a mast amidships to carry sail. We had tried, of course, to ship a new propeller, but it meant the shifting of tons and tons of cargo to get her stern out of the sea, and the task was beyond us. It was a long strain, and we were again out of water before we finally rounded into Brunei.

There was talk and more on board concerning the beautiful savage lad, the madly painted elephants, and, most of all, the jeweled cap and the gold and diamond net. The tale of them was a great satisfaction to little Captain Lamb; I verily believe it helped his bones to knit. You see, he had never been himself sure that what he told at McFane's was not born of drink.

It was his plan to return and get these riches after his next trip to London, a plan I attempted in vain to discourage. Besides, not taking into consideration the injustice of robbing yon savage, I doubted

me would it be an easy task from what I kenned of his breed. The son of Kratas, priestess of the Land of Blood, and of the Englishman, Dillingame, bold and obstinate adventurer, was most unlikely to yield up what was his without a struggle.

The mates, neither of whom had been with us, pretended to doubt the entire tale; called it a vision of thirst-maddened men. The eight men of the crew who rowed the boat had come to believe they had let slip the opportunity of a lifetime, and this belief was kept alive in them by the tiny wharf-rat Bob.

The wee cockney was a man distraught. He even dared to reproach me, till I slapped him his length on the deck, for not shooting the savage. As for the Honorable Archie, he found great joy in writing to Leonora a letter in which he told with a fair wasteful prodigality of adjectives of the yellow-diamond net, a gaud beside which the sixty-thousand-pound hair-dress she coveted was a tinsel thing, as a penny whistle to the bonny pipes of Scotland.

We were by-ordinar' glad to reach Brunei. Archie sent off his letter (and he was chuckling); the captain had himself carried ashore to a hospital of sorts (after he had arranged to have his cargo unloaded); and I, taking along with me the Honorable Archie, called on the resident with the ship's papers, since both the mates had promptly got drunk.

A word about this resident—bearing in mind that nothing ever changes in the East save affections.

He looked exactly the same as he had many, many years ago, and he was engaged in the identical task at which I had left him, namely, indexing everything. He was daft over indexes, and when he wasn't working with them took his recreation studying "Burke's Peerage." He knew me at once, though we had not been exactly what you might call friends. After indexing, reindexing, and cross-indexing my papers, he asked me of Trevor Dillingame.

"Dead," I answered laconically.

"I must transfer his card," he exclaimed, hauling open one of a hundred file cabinets and extracting a square pasteboard. "My, my, what a troublesome fellow he was! But his kind is gradually disappearing—your record is filed next to his, Mr. Freeman—there are few of the old, turbulent spirits left, very few, I am thankful to say. Now let me have your companion's name," he concluded, glancing at my laddie. "Sailor, I presume—second mate possibly. I am a good judge of men's social standing in the community."

"A. Lommond," volunteered the boy good humoredly.

"The Honorable Archie Lommond, of Loch Lomond," I corrected.

"The—Hon.—Archibald—Lommond," he gasped, "second son of Lord Lommond! My dear sir, my dear sir, permit me to welcome you to British Borneo. It is only too seldom we are honored by a visit from a member of the old families—the aristocracy. You must come to a small entertainment I am giving this evening—meet my daughter—I won't take no for an answer. You will pardon my mistake in identifying you. The man you were with—"

"Mr. Freeman is an old friend and retainer of our family," interrupted the Honorable Archie. "I go no place without him."

"Quite so, quite so," fussed the resident. "Mr. Freeman must come, too." He certainly hated to ask me, and took his revenge in adding, "'Twill be a new experience for him."

Outside, the lad turned to me with a very solemn face.

"You do not happen to know of any low dive where there is no respect for the aristocracy, do you?" he asked.

"I do, and I will take you there," I assented promptly.

The House of Unending Happiness and Delight, so called by its Chinese proprietor, but more generally known as the Devil's Club, is nothing more than a

cluster of big, nipa-thatched huts built upon piles above the water, as indeed is all Brunei. It is not, in a manner of speaking, a nice place. You may smoke opium in the back rooms, gamble at a crazy roulette-wheel or any other game you may suggest, drink, eat, and watch the native girls dance as women do in the East alone.

There is no limit to sinfulness, with the additional spice that you may be dropped, a knife between your shoulder-blades, through a trap in the floor, whence the tide carries you out to sea, saving the expense of a regular funeral.

Though it was but mid-afternoon, the tumult from it came to us from half a mile away, and my laddie raised his head at the sound like a hungry wolf. Nearer, we could hear the sailors from the hut apportioned to them roaring out the last lines of a chantey, " Fair Betty ":

" 'E'll walk with sailor men no more,
Yo, ho, an' walk the man round,
But wed a tinker an' live ashore,
Yo, ho, an' walk the man round.
Walk the man round, walk the man round,
Yo, ho, an' walk the man round.
For sailors is rotten as men can be,
The bloke ashore is the bloke for me—
Yo, ho, an' walk 'im round and round,
Yo, ho, an' walk 'im round!"

From the portion of the place set aside for the captains and mates came oaths, yells, and snatches of drunken song. The place fair leaked wicked noises.

" All the pleasures of hell," remarked the Honorable Archie as we sprang from the boat and entered the Devil's Club.

The Chinese proprietor—he looked like an old, dried, and yellowed prune—knew me at once. They never forget any one, and, losh, but what an evening followed! We did not start to drink, in a manner of speaking, but it must be that the sea-sickness was still on me, for I think I was a wee bit touched by the liquor.

I don't mind all that happened very clearly. The place was near full, and at our table sat, besides me and the Honorable Archie, the first mate, Smith, a German orchid-collector who mixed brandy with his beer, a remittance man, or maybe two of them, who sang hymns and cursed turn and turn about.

I have a somewhat confused recollection of telling a slant-eyed, giggling Chinese girl that I doubted me were she really wicked, because every one was born good, and she was hardly old enough for this to have worn off; of Dyak girls, their blackened teeth ornamented with tiny, gold stars let into the enamel, waving their long hands, the nails dyed to a crimson, as they swayed to the slow beat of native instruments; then of trouble between the mate, Smith, and a Portuguese gambler, the flash of a knife, the sudden extinguishing of all the lights, and I found myself out under the moon in a boat with the Honorable Archie.

" Yon is a pleasant place, Andy," he laughed, " and, man, you are fair drunk."

" 'Tis not so," I objected. " I will argue it with you."

" Not with me," he refused. " I have heard you argue too often. We'll say you are a little dizzy from lack of exercise. Take the oars and row us to the residency if you know the way."

I did, of course, though I had never been inside the big house which stood on the only really dry ground in Brunei. Also I thought it very late to go a calling —seemed to me we had been in the Devil's Club for hours—until the lad pulled out his watch and announced it was but nine o'clock; nor was I sure that the Honorable Archie was entirely sober himself. However, my feelings were hurt at his accusation, so I took the oars in dignified silence and rowed to where he had bidden me—catching several crabs on the way.

We ran into something of a surprise. The house was lit up in every corner—fair wasteful I call it—and full of people in their best clothes, English people with a sprinkling of Dutch, and two Chinese mandarins. And they were all there to meet us, or rather to meet my laddie.

The way that old fellow, the resident,

rolled off his tongue, "the Honorable Archibald Lommond, son of Lord Lommond," as he introduced him, was fair sickening. 'Twas the same tone of deprecating delight with which a man says, "I have only four aces."

I tagged along behind, getting introduced sometimes, but more often ignored. We met the judge-advocate and his lady, the resident's secretary, and his three pretty daughters, the missionary, his wife, and five female children, a big Scotch doctor, the— I'll not attempt to catalogue them all, indexes not interesting me. Last, the resident's sister, a pleasing spinster, led us up to a big chair full of cushions and announced, "Miss Maud Wilberforce, the Hon. Archibald Lommond, Mr. Freeman!"

I'll give you my word I could see nothing at all save the gay-colored pillows until a little white hand no bigger than a child's was held out to us, and a voice said:

"I *am* delighted! Father is *so* pleased to have you here!"

Only then did I pick out the girl from her coverings—and held my breath. Her face was the whitest thing I have ever seen, and little, so little! Her lips were barely pink, her eyes deep blue, sad, and yet those of a child, while the bonny hair that framed her face was a soft gray. Losh, but yon was a sick lassie! A thread alone seemed to hold her to this wicked earth.

The resident carried me away quickly, leaving my laddie with his daughter, and left me with a middle-aged woman who wore red and told me at once that she adored men who did things. I'll no' deny that I have a way with women, and we flirted more than a bit. I hope her heart was not really touched, for I never saw her again.

'Twas a queer change from the half-naked dancing-girls, drinking, and raw sin of the Devil's Club, and it sobered me completely. Here were young girls in pretty, light frocks, young men who had never known what it was not to shave each morning, respectable people to whom the story of my life would be a tale of sin and horror—and I'm no' so wicked at that.

We drank thin claret punch without ice, ate very dry sandwiches, and some of the young people danced waltzes—I wonder what they would have said to the dancing we had seen earlier in the evening! The Honorable Archie sat down by the sick lassie, and I could hear his pleasant voice, which could be very soft like that of most big, strong men, mingling with the thin silver thread of her speech and with the tinkle of her laugh.

Time came to go, and, after promising to return for a lawn party on the morrow, we found a lascar to row us out to the Sarawak Queen. My lad made but one remark on the way:

"Andy, 'tis sometimes the weakest who are strongest in this world," a wild statement that gave a splendid opening for argument, but I was too sleepy to take advantage of it.

Fitting a new propeller on the shaft of the Sarawak Queen proved anything but an easy task. The jar to the machinery when the old one dropped off into the sea had thrown the entire in'ards of the ship out of gear. A month went past during which the Honorable Archie devoted a great part of his time to overseeing this work, dividing his days about evenly between the ship and the residency.

The laddie's sympathies were deeply stirred over Maud Wilberforce. The lassie was simply fading away, and the doctor could put no name to what ailed her.

"She looks like a pitiful, tiny gray mouse," so the lad spoke of her, "yet laughs the whole day through. There is no sentiment in it all, mind you well, you soft-hearted Highlander; she just likes to have me around because my bigness and strength cheers her."

He became unnaturally gentle those days, save when a workman did something wrong, and I was sorry for him. I

had my own views as to the sentiment involved, and it seemed to me a pity that his heart should be hurt through her suffering. Still it was undeniable that the wee gray lassie found pleasure in his company, and she was a healthier interest, and less expensive, than the gem woman.

In regard to this last, he had a very bitter letter from her, demanding that he give her, or surrender the option on, the sixty-thousand-pound gaud at once or she would take up with another man, and asking if it were really true concerning the gold net set with yellow diamonds of which he had written, or was he only trying to torture her. It bothered him a good deal for several days, then he forgot all about it; at least, did not answer the letter.

By this time little Captain Lamb was hobbling around on crutches, and his temper was that of a dog which has sat down on an angry bee. I'll grant he had reason, too. The crew was completely demoralized, thanks — we were nearly sure, though we could not prove it on him— to the wharf-rat, Bob. Also, from the night at the Devil's Club we never again set eyes on the first mate, Smith.

Result: bitter feeling on the part of Liberman, the second officer and chief engineer, who should have been promoted. Lamb thought fit, however, to offer the billet to the Honorable Archie, who accepted it promptly. I'll not say this was wise on the little captain's part, but he had his fill of troubles, and now that he was on shore again, drank steadily.

There is an end to everything, however, except some arguments—witness that with the evil McFane over his wicked doctrine of original sin—and the propeller was finally shipped, the steamer loaded, and the evening of the morrow set to sail for London. We were giving a reception on board the next afternoon to repay all the hospitality we had received, and it was to be a big day for Brunei, because the mail-packet from England was also due to get in in the morning.

Archie was late in returning from the residency that night, and he woke me when finally he was on board.

"Andy," he began, with no preliminary apology, "I had a talk with the doctor this evening, and he told me he doubted would Maud Wiberforce live the month should she stay in Brunei. She is sailing with us to-morrow."

"But, laddie," I gasped—"laddie, 'tis no' proper! What will Captain Lamb say, and he'll wake with an awful head from the quantity of drink he took on this day, and the poor lassie will die on our hands!"

"Her aunt is going with her, of course, you old fool of a Scotch prude!" he answered with anger. "I don't give a damn what Lamb says, and she *will not die!* I won't let her!"

It came about as he wished — everything always came about as he wished— and I was surprised at the way the little man took it, him with a wet towel around his head and eyes as red as peppers. It was agreed that the captain's and first mate's quarters should be given up to the two women; Lamb, Archie, and I were to bunk in the second mate's cabin, and Liberman was to go forward. It was an unusual proceeding, this last, and the second mate did not like it; but we excused it to him on the grounds that he might keep a closer watch over the men. Then we rigged the ship up with flags, washed down the decks, and prepared for our party in the afternoon.

The mail-packet was late in arriving, and dropped anchor only as the first of our guests came over the side. The lassie, well bundled up in a cheerful red rug that made her look more wee and gray by contrast, came soon after with her father and his sister. We made her comfortable in the largest cabin, and her aunt put her things in the other one, though she was to sleep in the same room with her niece.

From that time on the water was full of boats coming and going, the decks crowded, until the whistle blew at the turn of the tide, and the second mate shouted "All ashore!" The anchor came

up to the chantey of "Fair Betty"; the Sarawak Queen quivered as the engines turned over, pointed her nose to sea, the captain threw half a bottle of rum over the side, and we were off for London.

It took an hour to put things to rights on deck with a surly, sulky crew, and then, from below, came a startled feminine scream.

The lad and I raced down, to be met by the lassie's aunt.

"There is a woman in my cabin," she gasped, "and such a woman!"

The Honorable Archie, with me at his shoulder, strode to the door and flung it open.

Stretched full length in the bunk, smoking a cigarette, lay a woman, her fingers loaded with rings, a yellow diamond gleaming at her throat, but no yellower than the eyes that peered out at us from between half-closed lids, the eyes of a beast of prey—a great female cat.

"Leonora, by all that's unholy!" exclaimed Archie.

"The Gem Woman!" I echoed his surprise.

The more mysterious a happening appears, the simpler the explanation.

Leonora Vladinske — so the gem woman styled herself—had terminated her engagement in London; shipped for Brunei, arriving on the mail-packet which got in that evening; and, during the turmoil of our reception, had had her luggage transferred to the Sarawak Queen, and had herself gone to the stateroom to await a more propitious time for hauling the Honorable Archie over the coals. Nothing could be simpler, more unexpected, or more embarrassing. However, my laddie was equal to the occasion. Turning to me, he said formally:

"Andy, will you be good enough to inform Miss Wilberforce's aunt that Mme. Vladinske is unexpectedly sailing with us."

I bowed and backed out of the cabin. It was a pleasant task I anticipated, nor was I mistaken. The estimable spinster froze stiff as I delivered my message verbatim, so I was constrained to add tactfully, the idea being to gain her sympathy and, in a manner of speaking, enlist her upon my side:

"The lady is an actress that Archie ran away from London to escape. She wants him to give her some verra expensive diamonds."

There is no understanding the other sex! She froze still stiffer.

"Doubtless she has excellent reasons for expecting diamonds from him," came the answer. "I do sympathize with her, even though she is a cr-r-reature. However, I have not the slightest intention of allowing my niece to be contaminated by such an association. You will have the goodness to tell Mr. Lommond that I demand the ship be turned around at once and we be taken back to Brunei."

I bowed—there wasn't anything else to do—and returned to the other stateroom.

"Well, Lion," purred a voice from within, "since you refuse to return to London and give me that paltry diamond thing, perhaps you'll tell me what those women are doing on the boat. I don't care about the ancient virgin, but I had a peep at a sleeping, pretty little mouse of a thing. Am I to infer that you prefer her when you might have me!"

Very insulting, even putting aside the impropriety, I call it, and I waited to hear the Honorable Archie explode. He didn't, though I'll no' say his tone was exactly warm with affection.

"Your inferences do not concern me," he answered. "I only wish to warn you that you are not to speak to my *guests*" —he emphasized the word guests—"until we reach London. If you do I shall keep that head-dress, if I buy it, for myself."

"Or give it to that mouse-woman," she suggested venomously. "It would so become her style."

"Perhaps," he said coolly.

I knocked on the door, and a voice bade me enter. Losh, but they were a wonderful couple as they stood glaring at one another like two wild animals: the

big, gorgeously beautiful woman, with her flaming, yellow eyes, and my handsome, splendidly strong laddie.

"It is requested we 'bout ship and return to Brunei," I announced dryly.

"That we will discuss in the morning," said the Honorable Archie. "Meanwhile good night, Leonora." And he stepped outside, closing the door.

As we reached the upper-deck I started to speak.

"It seems to me you are in a difficulty, in a manner of—" But I did not finish the sentence, because something interrupted me—the screw had ceased to turn, the ship was coming to a slow stop.

We could hear Captain Lamb roaring down the tube to the engine-room; then came a furious call:

"Mr. Lommond! Mr. Lommond! Go below! There has been an accident—the engines have stopped—Second Mate Liberman is hurt!"

I followed the lad down into the bowels of the ship, and we were met at the bottom of the ladder by the tiny cockney, Bob.

"Mr. Liberman fell into the machinery, sir, a big wrench in 'is 'and. 'E's dead, an' one of the drivers is out of true."

Don't ask me what had happened, because I can't tell you. Machinery holds the same position in my mind as the multiplication table. I know that seven times seven comes out as forty-nine, and that if you pull a certain lever the machinery turns over. Why, in either case, is beyond me.

We buried poor Liberman, his skull crushed in like an egg-shell, at once, the captain reading the service; then the Honorable Archie and Bob — the only other person on board who was intimately acquainted with engines — tinkered the whole night through down in the hold of the steamer. By morning we were going ahead at quarter speed, returning toward Brunei.

Food was sent to the passengers in their cabins; then they came on deck. The Honorable Archie said no word to Leonora, though he tucked her into a steamer-chair close to the bridge; Miss Wilberforce and her aunt he established comfortably at the stern of the ship, announcing casually that we were pointed back to Brunei for some slight repairs. The spinster inclined her head coldly at this information, but gave no answer. Maud, however, chatted with him a few moments, the sea breeze blowing a mite of color into her pale cheeks.

Before the lad went below to the nap he had certainly earned, he gave me a few words of warning:

"Keep your eyes open, Andy. That piece of shafting was pried out of true; no monkey-wrench could do so much damage, nor should I be surprised if Liberman had been murdered. Bob shares my suspicions. There are some pretty tough characters in the crew."

I mind me it was a beautiful day. The sea was as smooth as a lassie's cheek, save where the dolphins cut the water as they lazily turned over, blowing and leaving a thin wake of silver.

Maud was talking to her aunt, her voice coming to me thin and sweet with the soft note of a pipe of reeds; Leonora lay in her chair, a beautiful, feline thing, her yellow eyes blinking in the sun like those of some great cat. A sailor, slush-bucket and mop in his hands, came aft, battened down the hatches tight, and began to swab them off. I walked slowly forward at a call from Bob.

"Wish you'd step into the forecastle, sir," he asked respectfully. "One of the men is sick, an' it looks like smallpox to me."

He stepped aside to let me precede him down the ladder. I mind me the forecastle was strangely silent as I descended the last rungs. Then a heavy body lit on my shoulders from behind, bearing me to the ground; men piled upon me, choked me silent, and in a trice I was gagged, tied hand and foot, as only sailors can tie.

"No 'arm shall come to you, sir," said Bob; and then to the men: "Carry 'im on deck so we can watch 'im. The 'Onor-

able Archie is battened down under 'atches. Now for Lamb!"

Lying on my side, as helpless as a chrysalis in my cocoon of ropes, I saw the end of the tragedy.

The cockney called Lamb to the rail. A sailor stole up from behind and brought a belaying-pin down on the captain's head, and his inert body went over the side into the sea.

## CHAPTER IV.

### DEADLOCK.

THERE had been no shouting, no disturbance. The murder was perpetrated as calmly and systematically as a man slips on his coat.

Lying there helpless—and my bonds had begun to eat into my flesh—I could not feel horror at what I had seen; just wonderment that such a thing *could* be true!

The wind blew to me Maud Wilberforce's voice; four bells struck from the bridge; the ship plowed steadily on through the calm sea. It could not be that cruel murder had been done before my eyes, that black mutiny ruled supreme ! Yet it *was* true. My own state furnished the best of proof, and I now completely realized that everything centered around this cockney wharf-rat, the tiny sailor Bob, who dominated every man of the crew.

Under his orders, a sailor went aft to relieve the man at the wheel. The steamer swung at right angles to her former course. I even noticed that the speed had increased.

The little man walked over to where I lay and gazed down on me musingly. Then he drew back his foot and kicked me in the ribs without heat, without anger.

"That's for 'itting me when I talked to you about the feller on the white elephant," he announced unemotionly. "Now we're square. Listen to what I 'ave to say carefully. We are goin' to 'ave a talk. It won't do no good for to shout. It would only alarm the lydies, who are to be kep' in ignorance of what 'as taken place. The 'Onorable Archie is battened down, an' I 'ave a man at each 'atch besides. Now I am goin' to tike off your gag."

And he did.

There was a long silence. He was waiting to see if I would scream, and, I noticed, was balancing an iron belaying-pin in his hand. When he spoke again it was in a different tone of voice—a whine. Life had treated him badly; he had never had a chance; his tastes were far above his station, accounted for by the theory that he was the illegitimate son of some toff. Actually, the man was trying to justify himself!

Then he got down to business. I was necessary to him, because we were to steam back to the northern coast and get the diamond-studded gold net and the jeweled cap. My part was to lure the son of Kratas from the elephants while they were in the sea, that he might be quietly disposed of! Bob even went so far as to promise me some of the loot if I did everything to please him—glancing around cautiously — the sailors thought they were to have a share in it, but they weren't.

The steamer was to be sailed back to Singapore, where he and I, with the treasure, would desert, leaving the crew to suffer all the penalties of the mutiny. He paused for breath.

"What of the Honorable Archie?" I asked, more to gain time than anything else. The fate of any one not necessary to the tiny devil was quite settled in my mind.

Bob examined me narrowly before replying.

"'E won't be 'urt," he finally conceded. "We'll leave 'im on shore with the elephants."

Another lie, I mentally registered, and then questioned as to the women.

"We'll leave them ashore, too, unless you wants them!"

The voice of the Gem Woman, raised in anger, came to us, and bending down, Bob quickly cut my bonds.

"Go to 'er," he ordered, "an' don't let 'er know what 'as 'appened. I'll be within ten feet of you with this," and he showed me my own automatic.

Pleasant, wasn't it? I walked forward to find a trembling sailor confronting Leonora, who was furiously demanding that the hatchway be opened at once.

"Verra sorry, madam," I apologized, "but the captain's orders are that no one can go below at present."

"My jewel-box is in my stateroom, and I must have it now."

"Jewel-box," repeated Bob, stepping forward. "It should be left with me."

"Who are you, pray?" she demanded haughtily, sweeping him from head to foot with a single look.

"I'm the captain," he answered, flushing beneath the contempt in her eyes.

No question but that the woman was clever, quick as sin itself to seize the something intangible, the change in the atmosphere. She glanced at me, then quickly back at the self-styled captain, and I knew in a flash that she sensed all was not well.

"Of course it should be left with you," she answered quickly, flashing on the little villain one of those wonderful smiles that London audiences had paid thousands of pounds to see. "I'll go down and get it if you'll have this impertinent sailor remove the hatch."

Bob's face was a study. Quick suspicion, cupidity, doubt played across it. He did not want her let into the secret of the mutiny—at least, at the present time—he coveted the jewels, was uncertain whether they were not a ruse invented so that she might rouse the Honorable Archie.

Then she smiled at him again.

"Is the box very heavy?" he demanded with a last trace of cunning.

"Very heavy," she acknowledged. "Mr. Freeman had better come with me to bring it up."

"No; I'll send three sailors," he answered quickly, and motioning the man to remove the hatch, beckoned to several of the hands who were loitering just beyond the officers' dead-line.

So absorbed had we all been in our own little drama that, from behind, the frigid voice of the elderly spinster made us all jump.

"Will you be good enough to stand aside? My niece desires to go downstairs to her stateroom."

Bob stepped forward, hesitated, drew back. I could easily surmise what was going through his mind: whether it would be better to hold the women for hostages against the Honorable Archie and risk raising a disturbance — that would make it more difficult to secure Leonora's jewels—or make sure of the heavy box still keeping the Wilberforces in ignorance of the real state of affairs on board ship.

The second plan prevailed. Maud and her aunt went slowly down the steep iron stairway; Leonora followed, and behind her the three sailors. A mad plan of diving after them flashed through my brain, but Bob had anticipated this. His weapon was pointed straight at my heart.

A tense five minutes passed, and then the three sailors reappeared at the bottom of the ladder, lugging a small black steamer-trunk.

"Is it 'eavy?" Bob whispered eagerly down to them.

"Not so 'eavy has hawkward," one answered, and they heaved the box up onto the deck.

"Go forward!" he ordered them sharply and smashed the lock with a belaying-pin.

Jerking up the cover, he bent over, his eyes green with covetousness, and I had just time to glimpse a long switch of brown hair lying upon some chastely thick female night-clothes, before I slid quietly down the companionway.

It was not twenty feet to the second officer's quarters — all the staterooms opened up into a large mess-room—and I woke the Honorable Archie so drastically

that he was on his feet in an instant, his hands fighting for my throat.

"Quick! Quick!" I whispered. "The captain has been murdered; the ship is in the hands of Bob, and all the women are safe below."

Outside in the mess-room a stream of vile language came down on us, and Bob prepared to descend the companionway.

"Tell him you'll shoot!" I hissed at Archie; and automatically he called:

"Back or I'll shoot!"

Bob scrambled quickly out of sight.

The Wilberforces' cabin opened and the spinster appeared. Paying no attention to us, and with tightly compressed lips, she knocked primly on Leonora's door. It opened promptly, and the two women confronted one another.

"My trunk is in your cabin, madam," the older woman announced frigidly. "I should like it moved into mine."

"Sorry, but I gave it to the sailors."

"You — gave — it — to — the — sailors! Why, what for?"

"To save my own jewels," answered the Gem Woman, stepping aside and indicating a four-foot square black box.

"You—you hussy!" exploded the spinster; but it was time for me to intervene.

In as few words as possible, I told of our predicament; of the murder of Captain Lamb, the plan to sail back to the northern coast of Borneo, that I had been spared for the present to act as interpreter, and of Bob's attempt to secure the jewels.

White-faced, the women listened while the Honorable Archie ransacked all the cabins for weapons, and in vain. It was not the spinster who gave way, however; her English fighting blood came quickly to the surface, driving the pallor from her cheeks.

"We'll do the best we can," she spoke bravely; "but let us keep Maud in ignorance of all this as long as possible."

Leonora collapsed on a locker and began to sob bitterly.

"All my gems, my precious, lovely stones, will be taken from me—all of them! I can't bear it! I can't bear it! You *must* save them, Lion! Give the mutineers that mouse-faced woman; give them anything, but not my darling jewels! Save them, and I'll adore you as no other woman ever could."

It was not nice to hear. I'll use no harsher word. A plan had been forming in my mind as I listened, a wild chance for all our salvations—wild, indeed, but the only one. I needed but a few moments to put it to the test, and those few moments were mercifully vouchsafed me.

A furious altercation going on above our heads came to an abrupt climax as an angry voice stuttered:

"So you were fooled into letting them all get together below; fooled with a damn lie about jewels, you penny-squeezing, gold-lusting, smarty of a dirty little cockney! Now we're in for a fight. Gawd knows how many guns they have below! Why didn't you get rid of the whole boiling of them while you could? You—"

"Who's capt'in 'ere?" cried Bob's voice, raised so high that it cracked. "Who's capt'in 'ere, I'd like for to know? Get for'ard or I'll—"

There was the sound of a heavy man springing along the deck, the *spat-spat-spat* of my automatic in Bob's hand, a fall, then the rush of many fleeing feet.

"Get for'ard, every last one of you swine," shouted Bob, "an' throw that carrion overboard! The next bloke what dares me goes the same way! I'll attend to them in the cabin; I'll attend to them proper!"

Meanwhile I had been feverishly busy.

The jewel-chest now lay beneath a skylight which commanded the entire mess-room, the cabins alone being out of the angle of fire from it. The jewels themselves were spilled out of their individual cases into one great, glittering heap in the box, and the cover I had filled with gold and paper money gleaned from all of us.

A rope was tied to the handle of the box so it could easily be hauled across the floor without necessity of coming within

range of the skylight; and holding the other end of the rope, I stood in the door of Leonora's cabin, the spinster at my shoulder, the Gem Woman, who had gone half mad over my handling of her jewels, firmly held in the Honorable Archie's arms.

The plot developed quickly.

"Bob," I called, "look down through the skylight!"

"I'll skylight you, damn you," he answered, "I'm comin' an' kill you all!"

"If you take one step down that companion way you're a dead man," I answered. "Don't make the mistake of forgetting that Mr. Lommond has a gun!" He hadn't.

Silence for a time, then a smothered exclamation:

"My Gawd!"

I knew he was looking cautiously down through the skylight, knew his covetous eyes were upon the jewels and money, and gave him a minute to gaze his fill. Then, by means of the rope, I hauled the box into the cabin out of his range of vision.

"Bob," I said sternly, "there is a hundred thousand pounds worth of jewels there besides the money. Unless you go forward at once I'll throw every scrap of it into the sea through the portholes. I am coming on deck now. If you or any other man are above the officers' dead line, overboard goes every diamond, every coin! I'll give you five minutes to get back and tell the crew about this."

You can easily imagine my feelings as I climbed the companion ladder and stuck my head up above the level of the deck. I verily expected to have it blown off. However, it was not. All of the crew, save the stokers, and including Bob, were grouped well back of the dead line, and the little cockney at once addressed me.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," he said respectfully, "but would you mind bringing the lady's jewels an' the money on deck. The men are for a killin' of you all, bein' desperit, an' they must 'ave some excuse for a letting of you live."

"Step back ten paces and face the bow," I ordered, "then I'll have the jewels brought up — and placed on the rail," I added significantly.

They held some parley among themselves over this, but finally did as I had demanded. Under my direction Archie carried up the square box — it was a load for a very strong man—and placed it close to the side of the ship. The men crowded forward, but I caught up a handful of the trinkets and held them over the sea.

They stepped back then.

The next three days were as strange as I have ever spent. We met no other ships, the weather held beautiful, and Maud Wilberforce, under the tender care of her aunt, grew better every hour. Either Archie or I had to keep continual guard over Leonora — she was a woman distraught — mad to get her treasures back into her own possession, and we kept those treasures on deck day and night.

Once, when the English spinster was watching over them, Bob tried to bluff, and walked boldly forward. I doubt me would I have done it, but she did not hesitate. Catching up a pearl necklace in one hand, gold and bills in t'other, she cast them into the sea. Also her foot was against the chest ready to push it overboard through the opening we had made in the rail. Bob jumped nimbly back across the dead line.

I have some suspicion that what she did gave her no little satisfaction for the loss of her own trunk that the Gem Woman had given away. The sailors paraded around wearing her night garments, a shameful thing for any woman to see.

We were close to the coast, now, slipping along slowly, and Bob spent all his time in the bows, a pair of glasses to his eyes. I prayed, but prayed in vain,

that he would be unable to locate the anchorage to which we had been driven by the storm, but the shore line so curved that it was impossible to miss it.

At sunset of the fourth day the fires were banked, anchor chains rattled through the hawse holes, and the Sarawak Queen swung to the tide, then hung motionless save for the easy rise and fall of the ground swell.

While the crew was busy at the bow we swiftly carried the jeweled chest below, and then all met in Leonora's cabin. It was thought best to let Maud into the secret of our predicament, but we might have saved ourselves the trouble because she had more than half guessed it.

Instead of the prospect of danger, death itself, doing her harm, I verily believe the excitement acted in exactly the opposite manner; at any rate there was color in her cheeks and she took an active part in all we planned.

Leonora, on the contrary, evinced not the slightest interest in the future, all her attention was absorbed in looking over her jewels, putting them back in their individual cases, and her mind was divided between joy at the recovery of her treasures and grief over the loss of the necklace of pearls which the English spinster had so ruthlessly cast into the sea.

Carefully we went over the situation detail by detail, and it was not a happy one. True the crew consisted now of only eighteen men, the death of the three ship's officers, the man killed by the son of Kratas, and the sailor Bob had shot down with my automatic having thus reduced it, but eighteen against two men, two women and a slip of a girl were big odds.

The great question was, would these mutineers, every last one of them a rope around his neck, stick to the original mad purpose of attempting to steal the treasure of the elephants, or content themselves with trying to acquire Leonora's jewels?

It was all on the lap of the gods. We could make no plans, could only await the next move. One thing we did decide upon, however, that under no circumstances would we consent to be separated. We would meet our fate, whatever it might be, together.

We slept not at all that night. Toward morning there were high words forward, the unmistakable sounds of a fight ending abruptly with the vicious spat of my automatic, but this disturbance was as nothing to the hubbub that arose at daylight when the mutineers discovered the jewels no longer on deck. Again it was a shot that restored quiet. Then we heard the crew launching the three life boats.

"All aboard for the shore!" came Bob's voice down the skylight in tones he strove to make jocular.

"Don't answer anybody," I whispered.

"All aboard for the shore! Step lively, 'as the 'angman said to the man 'e was 'angin'," the cockney called with charming humor.

Again silence.

"Look 'ere," he spoke plaintively, "you ain't a treating of me right. I 'ave kept the men from smokin' of you out by promisin' them you would do as I told you. Do you want to make me out a bloomin' liar!"

"We are not going ashore," I announced curtly.

"I'll 'ave you burned out," he shrilled back, "blawst you! I'm through with treatin' you kind an' proper."

"Burn away," I answered, "at the first move you make more of the jewels and money, if not all, go overboard."

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## CHAPTER V.

### UNDER THE FEET OF THEM.

IT was a deadlock.

Of course we realized that every trinket we cast away weakened our hold on life, the loss of the entire treasure would leave us absolutely at the

mercy of the mutineers. Had we but one weapon it might have been different. We were, however, totally without firearms and knew that Bob owned a revolver in addition to the automatic he had taken from me, also there were probably pistols among the crew. In other words we could make no move, were condemned to wait what fate dealt out to us.

Our refusal had evidently upset Bob's plans and there was another noisy conference forward. The little cockney returned from it and spoke down through the skylight in quite a different tone.

"You make it very 'ard for me to pertect you," he whined, "and I wish you well, blime me if I don't! You'll 'ave to come on deck with the loot, though, for I can't 'old the 'ands."

I didn't dare run our bluff too strong and, besides, it was unbearably hot in the cabins. With the same precautions as we had used before I got the square box to the rail and we grouped our chairs about it. All three of the ship's boats were in the water forward, and on the same side, and the men were drawing lots to see who should remain to guard us, who go ashore on the hunt for the jeweled golden net.

I counted up the crew and they numbered sixteen all told, six of whom were left behind. Reluctantly, and only on their absolute refusal to remain unless he gave it to them, Bob yielded up a revolver. I surmised from this that it was the sole weapon, save my automatic, on board, and subsequent happenings proved me correct. The ten men pulled rapidly for the shore while our sulky guards settled themselves close to the dead line.

Losh, but that was a hot day! The sun just fired its rays down on us, in a manner of speaking, and the pitch bubbled from the seams beneath our feet. Aft, we managed to rig up an awning under which Maud Wilberforce and her aunt were established and where Archie and I took turns seeking relief from the glare of the sun, t'other keeping guard over the jewels and, at the same time, Leonora.

By midday the heat was well nigh unbearable and the six sailors were feeling it as much as were we, sleeping mostly, but one, the revolver ready in his hand, always keenly on watch.

Archie came back from the stern to relieve me where I sat next to Leonora—she would not go out of sight of the jewels—guarding the black box. With a gesture he called me to the rail.

"Andy, this is our big chance," he said, "and it may not come again. There are only six of them, we might make a rush were it not for the women and the gun, but you must think of some way out!"

My brain was an absolute blank, and I scratched my head above where it is supposed to lie.

"I can't," I answered desperately, "that gun blocks every plan I make."

"You must," he demanded, "we can't go on this way. After the luncheon the day will be hottest, they will be most off their guard. Think, you hard headed Highlander, you have never failed me before, think, think!"

I couldn't think. I went back to the stern and sat, my head in my hands, the only thing that would come to me a crushing argument against that evil McFane's doctrine of original sin. Then the spinster woman, God bless her, spoke, or rather gasped:

"I wonder if it would not be cooler in one of the little boats near the water."

A dim ray of hope came to me, shone brighter, gradually expanded into a plan—if plan it might be called. I sauntered back to the Honorable Archie.

"Pull the treasure chest further astern," I ordered. "I have an idea."

Without question he dragged the box along the deck, always keeping close to the rail. The guard roused himself and came to the dead line, then walked back to his comrades. What difference did it make as long as the box was in sight.

"Look here," I whispered, "if we can get ashore and to that savage, who is a friend of mine, I'll defy all the cockney mutineers in the world to find us in the jungle."

"We'll have to grow wings, Andy."

"No, you'll have to grow fins. Listen carefully," and I outlined my plan.

Here it is: The lad was to slip overboard quietly, not only for fear of alarming the sailors but also so as not to attract the sharks that swarmed in those waters, swim to the boats floating by the side of the ship, take the plug out of one, cut t'other lose and drift with it to the stern. As quickly as possible, concealed by the awning which I made a pretense of adjusting, all were to slip aboard, then, the jewel chest hustled down, we took our chance of getting out of revolver shot.

It was not, in a manner of speaking, a feasible plan, but it had some bare elements of possibility and a spark of hope glimmered in my heart as I looked into the lad's eyes.

There was a scream of rage from Leonora that brought us swinging around on our heels. While his five companions, racing down the deck, were nearly upon us, a dripping man had climbed over the rail, thrown himself on the jewel chest and was desperately trying to snap shut the lock. I kicked furiously at him, but the gem woman was before me.

From her bosom flashed out a curved knife, which in a breath she buried between his shoulders, and he rolled aside dead.

Archie dove at the sailor with the revolver, brought him to the deck just as he pulled trigger.

I felt my right arm bone crack, a sear of fire ran up my shoulder and, sick, reeling, I pulled open the cover of the box to cast jewel after jewel into the sea. The four sailors gave back, turned and ran. Archie twisted the wrist of the fellow beneath him, the gun spun over the side with a sharp splash, and he held his foe helpless.

Leonora's hands grasped my left wrist as I was blindly lifting another diamond gaud, then I saw black and lost consciousness.

I came to with my head in the spinster's lap. Maud was spilling a bucket of sea water over both of us. The jewel chest had been pulled to the very stern and Archie was not to be seen.

"Rouse yourself, my brave man, rouse yourself!" said the Englishwoman. "It is now or never for us!"

My arm hurt excruciatingly, but I managed to stagger to my feet. Leonora was kneeling above the captured sailor, who was now bound, her knife at his throat. As I managed to pull the awning down so as to conceal us Maud dropped a rope ladder over the stern.

"Hurry, hurry!" came a voice from the water and Archie climbed back on deck. He swung the bound man by a rope's end across the thwarts of the lifeboat, with a mighty effort had the jewel chest down, the women scrambled aboard somehow, and the lad strained at the oars.

There were furious shouts from the ship, the four sailors sprang into the other boat but, plug removed, it sank beneath them, and they splashed back to the ladder. Not all of them, though. The water broke to the rise of a mighty fin; a man was jerked out of sight, and the sea in his throat choked his last cry of anguish.

Well toward the shore we readjusted the boat. I moved up into the bow, an iron belaying pin in my left hand. The prisoner was placed on the seat in front of me, his arms unbound, and given a pair of oars. Archie rowed from the second seat, and we slipped over the bar into the interior inlet.

"Drive straight among the mangroves," I ordered.

The sun was setting, and I feared to meet Bob's crew returning to the ship. Barely were we in time when their boat came into view. The sailor in front of me struggled to his feet and opened his

mouth to call. Even now I dislike the memory of how his body went limp, his skull crushed beneath the stroke of my belaying pin.

The tropic sun dived out of sight; night, black, choking, relentless was upon us.

Archie pushed the heavy boat free of the mangroves, and we floated away from the dead sailor. Then he shifted the treasure box amidships, Leonora moving up with it.

From her nest of rugs in the stern came Maud's voice:

"Oh, how I wish I were strong and could do something to help!"

"You can't," spoke up the gem woman cruelly, "but I can, and I shall row."

"What had we better do?" asked the lad. "I'm stumped, Andy!"

"Go down the coast where Bob's boat came from," I directed. "We'll be caught like rats in a trap in the morning, unless I can find yon savage."

There was no sound for a time save the lap of water against the bow, the drip from the oars, or the splash of fish breaking in the dark. Suddenly the moon popped out from behind a black cloud bringing the shore line into sharp silhouette against the sky and showing the heavier growth that marked the outlet of the river.

"Look for the place where the other boat broke through," I directed.

We pushed into the overgrown swamp and then the moon went behind another cloud.

"Have to wait for morning, now," I groaned. My whole left side seemed on fire and I was getting light-headed.

"Are you in much pain?" asked the spinster.

"Fool that I am," Archie exclaimed bitterly. "Your arm should be set, of course, and I don't know how to do it!"

"It would relieve me, laddie," I answered, "and I can show you how."

He was very gentle, that great, strong man, and the Englishwoman helped him as best she could, but losh, how it did hurt! There was fever in my veins, for it seemed not I, but another man, who was going through the agony, and I marveled that this other man did not cry out.

At last 'twas done; my bone set and held in place with splints from a broken oar, the bullet probed out whence it had lodged against my shoulder blade, and Archie snapped off the electric torch that was attracting the mosquitoes in swarms.

Came to me the trumpeting of many elephants, and I slept through the pure weariness of pain.

Morning dawned in a drizzle, and the fever had me so firmly in its grip that I scarce recognized my surroundings. It was easy, however, in the light to push forward into the mouth of the river, and the fresh water was grateful to our parched palates. The sandy shore had been trampled by the feet of innumerable elephants, but none were in sight at that moment.

I lifted up my voice and called in Ida'an, and called again, but answered only the screaming of the forest birds, and one solitary, far off trumpeting.

"What now, Andy?" asked the Honorable Archie, and I sat silent thinking.

We were unquestionably in a desperate case. It was not to be expected that Bob and his mates would permit us to go free with Leonora's jewels could they help it; indeed they would not—could not even let us live since we stood as witnesses of their crimes. Even did we succeed in avoiding them we were hardly better off—worse off should we not find the son of Kratas.

"Let us row on, first of all," I suggested, "and find a place to bury the jewel box. We can't take it with us if we travel on shore."

The river made a sharp elbow within the mile and, landing on a small patch of sand, we buried the gem woman's gauds well back from the shore at the foot of an old nipa palm.

Again we were on the water moving

up slowly against the current, while I racked my fevered brain to decide what next. My thoughts would stray off to inconsequential things; the sheen of the gem woman's hair, the splendid long sweep of her back, McFane's evil smile as he goaded me with his doctrine of original sin. "'Tis plain," he always began his argument. Plain? Plain? The son of Kratas had said something about plain! The way was plain, yes, that was it!

The boat lost way; before us the river was choked from brim to brim with water hyacinths, and I knew how hopeless it was to think of forcing a passage through them.

"Row back," I directed dully, "the way is plain from the beach and we must go inland."

Archie looked at me sharply, the fever must have shown in my voice, and I smiled back at him. And why shouldn't I smile at the sight of a man with his head upside down upon his shoulders.

We beached the boat close to where the sand ended and the jungle rioted to the very water's edge. I hoped there the elephants would not trample upon it. There was an opening in the wall of trees whence the tracks all converged, and then, indeed, I say that the way was plain. A road opened up before us, a sunken road with masonry sides twenty feet high, paved with stone and a gutter down the center whence ran off the rain to be swallowed up in the sand.

"Come on," I called, "it is not far." And I shepherded all of them before me. One last glance over my shoulder and I saw Bob's boat, manned by all the mutineers, break from the swamp and shoot for the shore.

Half a mile and Maud sank to the ground. Without a pause Archie picked her up and went on with her in his arms. Then I stumbled and fell, rose, and the spinster gave me her hand. Rain was falling swiftly now and the road was fast turning into a river.

"We'll have to get out of here," Archie flung over his shoulder, glancing up at the walls that penned us in on either side. "We'll have to get out of here!"

"Get out of here," I repeated after him.

Rounding a curve the Englishwoman's grip on my hand tightened.

"Thank God," she said simply, and pulled me to the left of the road.

A steep flight of stone steps had been let into the rock and up it we scrambled to a broad platform above. There was a shout behind us and, peering through the drizzle, I saw the mutineers, headed by Bob, coming swiftly on between the high walls.

The Honorable Archie was gathering great stones at the head of the stairway, the gem woman helping him. Maud was on her knees praying, and her aunt slipped an arm around my waist as I swayed where I stood.

Running ahead of his men Bob reached the foot of the steps, raised his gun, and a well directed missile from Archie's hand caught it on the muzzle and sent it spinning from his fingers.

As noiselessly as the flight of a night bird an elephant appeared below — another and another. A long trunk plucked at the cockney, and he scrambled up among us. Then the road was full of elephants. I heard a man scream. There broke out an inferno of trumpeting and, trunks raised, a solid column of the great monsters roared past us.

"My Gawd, my Gawd!" sobbed Bob, and fell in a dead faint at my feet.

For a breath the road was empty and then, slowly, majestically hove into view the white painted elephant, net of gold set with yellow diamonds over his great body, and the nude, jasmine crowned savage on its back.

"Son of Kratas," I heard myself calling, as though from far, far away, "wicked men pursue us. Take us away from here."

Blue and yellow moons danced before my eyes striking against one another and bursting in dazzling glares of light.

Dimly I was conscious that one after another of our party was helped down to the backs of barbarically painted elephants, then I felt myself swaying to the lurch of a great beast, the Englishwoman's arms about my waist.

The son of Kratas turned to smile upon me.

"The wicked men are dead," he said, "crushed beneath the feet of the children of Them."

"Of Them," I repeated dully.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE MOUSE DEER.

I ONCE found a tract in a third class railroad carriage dealing with the immorality of the French nation. The only thing that stuck in my memory from it was the story of a lad named Rousseau who brought up a bairn with no knowledge of religion whatsoever. One afternoon he found him on top of a hill worshiping the sun.

From this, being of a thoughtful turn of mind and keen at an argument, I deduced that man from his very nature is bound to worship something, and I have often used the story with crushing force on those who obstinately disagreed with me.

We were a crowd of pagans in the heart of unexplored Borneo, all save Maud, who was the best lassie I have ever known. The Honorable Archie had made him a deity of pleasuring; Leonora unquestionably adored silly, bright stones; the spinster loved only her niece; Bob worshiped, or rather lusted after, loot; and the son of Kratas was wrapped up heart and soul in the elephants—*Them*, as he so deified them. I alone was without any definite God, though I really believe in every last one, pagan as well as civilized.

Certainly you could not blame the savage for his beliefs. He had found a temple ready made for his own private style of worship and there is nothing more awe inspiring in the jungle than the greatest of all beasts. Add to this their intelligence and that he had in some mysterious manner tamed them to his will, and you can easily see how they filled ever requirement of his spiritual nature.

When I was well enough to move about, which was only after weeks, bit by bit I explored the city; the "painted walls" as the son of Kratas designated the place. To this day I cannot explain it to myself.

No question that it antedated the Chinese, though their stamp was strong upon it. Archie even went so far as to put it down to the Phenicians from a coin he picked up in the treasure chamber. As a matter of fact it wasn't a built place at all but a dug out, or rather quarried out, one.

A great ten-acre rock rising above the wet jungle of the surrounding plain had been honeycombed into passages and rooms beyond counting. First came the outer wall with a kind of an eaves projecting inward so as to protect its decorations, and these decorations were endless.

The entire inner surface was painted in brilliant colors with crude representations of ceremonials in which always figured five immense elephants; one wavily striped with green, one covered with crimson and yellow circles, one blotched with purple, one streaked red with a jeweled cap on its head, and the last staring white and unquestionably covered with the jeweled gold net we knew so well.

After each of these ceremonial pictures the washing of the elephants was conventionally depicted, and the time of these washings indicated by drawings of the state of the moon. It was according to these ancient records that the son of the savage priestess of the Land of Blood and of the Englishman, Trevor Dillingame, regulated his life — an endless putting of Them through all that was depicted on the painted walls.

Though the five big elephants were

always the principal actors in every picture, there were also many more of the same beasts shown, and the son of Kratas kept a rough control over a herd numbering not less than two hundred individuals. These roamed and multiplied in the surrounding jungle while the five enormous males were stabled within the city. One additional mystery among many others was that the paintings never showed more than two human figures and always both of them men.

All this I mention now out of its proper place. I had no knowledge of it for many weeks, so that I may tell smoothly what happened after I grew better and could move about for myself.

I came back to consciousness to words sung in the Ida'an tongue, words that I idly translated within my mind:

"Great ones are we, through the jungle go
Smoothly moving as waters flow.
Smoothly moving yet in our wrath
Leaving a trail like the lightning's path.

"Lords of the jungle are we, are we,
Before us all of the jungle flee.
Lords of the jungle, over all,
The jungle that shakes to our trumpet call.

"Great ones are we, through the jungle go
Smoothly moving as waters flow.
Smoothly moving yet in our wrath
Leaving a trail like the lightning's path."

I opened my eyes lazily. Through the door of my stone room, open to the sky, I could see the little cockney, Bob, turning some spitted pheasants over a hot fire; the women pounding what I took to be rice; my laddie stringing a great bow; while the singer himself was passing from elephant to elephant making them raise their feet to examine them for thorns.

Bob finished with his birds, dished them up on flat rocks, came and bent over me, and his expression, save for a furtive something in his eyes like that of a caged wolf in the zoo, was of a normal, cheerful servant.

"What does it all mean?" I asked, my voice coming in a whisper that I, myself, could scarce hear.

"We 'ave all turned elephant worshipers," he answered, "an' are just stayin' 'ere waiting for you to get well."

"Archie," I interrogated, and he called to him respectfully.

"You have given us a scare, Andy," said the lad, "and you must get well quickly now. There are a million interesting things to see and talk over. Every one is extremely well," he answered the unspoken question in my eyes, "and your mad savage friend lives high, though personally he draws the line at food more than warmed. Go back to sleep now, and in a little while you'll be up and about."

There were a thousand things I wanted to ask, but a great drowsiness was over me, and I drifted back into unconsciousness.

In a few days I was well enough to talk and in a few more on my feet. It was a morning when the son of Kratas led his great beasts to the water to "bathe and be made clean," and the strangely painted animals filed down the ancient stone road, their master singing one of his countless ceremonial songs as he rode behind the flapping ears of the white leader.

"The moon has folded herself in two
Till she's half a moon—
The jungle through
*They* go to sea,
To come back soon.
Clean, all clean,
Through the forest green.
Decked once more till the moon unfold,
Stained with brilliant purple and gold,
Ruling all by day, by night,
Stained crimson, gold, and green, and white."

The words became unintelligible and were lost in the distance.

"Briefly this is how we stand," the Honorable Archie explained to me. "Every mutineer save Bob was crushed 'neath the feet of the elephants. I let him live to wait on us and because I expect to derive a great deal of satisfaction from seeing him hanged. Leonora

is mad over the net of gold and yellow diamonds—has made propositions to every separate one of us to steal it. Maud has found health in the wilderness, and her aunt is perfectly well and watches over her like a mother hen. I, of course, am happy and thoroughly enjoying the primitive hunting—though I must say I should be easier in my mind were the surrounding jungle not fairly alive with cobras.

"As soon as you can travel we will make plans to go back. The only trouble is this: that savage friend of yours is quite balmy — should be in an insane asylum. He actually worships those big, ugly, paint-smeared beasts, and assumes that we do so, too, and he also has evidently taken it for granted that we are to stay here forever. I'm actually acting as chambermaid to one of those damned elephants at the present time. Nor does he like me."

It was perfectly apparent that the Honorable Archie was not in love with his host, and I tactfully forebore to defend him, only remarking on how good-looking was the savage. With that he took the big bow he had made and went off a hunting.

I called Bob to lend me his arm, and walked around part of the walls examining the crude but realistic paintings. For a long time I could not understand how they had retained their brilliant colors through all the ages until I discovered by the accidental chipping away of the rock that the dye penetrated inches into the sandstone of which the walls were composed.

Bob was helpfully assiduous, and, after I had rested for a time, he took me to what he characterized as the loot. And it was certainly loot that it looked like! A great chamber, open to the sky as were all the others, simply overflowed with riches. There were piles of gold and silver coin, piles of semiprecious stones, gold dust, gold cast in bars, half rotted chests of wholly rotted silks, ivory carvings, a more casual or careless display of priceless treasure it would have been impossible to visualize.

I glanced from it to the cockney's face and then watched him curiously. As he gloated over the wealth his expression faded from lustful covetousness to complete indifference, then helpless anger, and he turned aside with a curse.

"Enough money there to make several millionaires," I remarked.

"Lot of good it does me," he answered, adding vindictively, "nor any of us."

"Doesn't interest you, then?" I hazarded.

"Interest me! Interest me! For days I went around loaded down with oof like a blooming mint. Then I saw I was a fool. I can't get away from 'ere—none of us can. I'd give my share of the loot for one glass of 'arf hand 'arf," he concluded, and kicked contemptuously into a heap of yellow money.

As the coin, rustling down with the silky noise of gold pieces rubbing together, spouted about his feet, a three-foot cobra wriggled from the mass and, rearing upright, raised its head. The cockney made a careless pass at it with his hand, and I cried out warningly:

"Be careful, you fool; don't you know that one touch of its fangs would make you a very dead man!"

"As good to die that way as stay 'ere forever or else be 'anged outside," he answered bitterly. "I don't believe it could 'urt me anyway."

Nevertheless he drew back.

Now I really should not have grieved one particle had the little villain died of snake-bite, but, like the Honorable Archie, I looked forward to seeing him hanged. Therefore I killed the cobra and extracted the fangs, showing him the poison-sack and how the deadly stuff ran up the hollow tooth, making of that tooth a perfect hypodermic syringe. He certainly was interested, asked a thousand questions, and volunteered the information that the city within the painted walls was alive with serpents.

Back near the elephant stables where

we dwelt Leonora called me apart, and I'll not give an account of the interview in detail, because I unquestionably have a way with women, and also because I am a modest man.

Yon cat woman, and losh, but she was beautiful! fair wooed me, and the object of her wooing was that I steal away with her, taking the jeweled golden net, and we go back to the Sarawak Queen. She even had it all planned.

As soon as I was well we were to loosen the green-painted elephant, who was the most tractable of the quintet, and drive it into the jungle just at nightfall when the son of Kratas was generally away. When he returned he would go a searching for his little pet, and in the meanwhile Leonora and I were to hurry down the stone road to the coast, disinter the jewel-box, launch the life-boat, and flee to the steamer.

I pointed out that no one man was strong enough to carry the jeweled net such a distance, and she countered with the argument that she was as strong as a man and would help me. I did not ask her why she selected me instead of the Honorable Archie or Bob, because, though there may have been some real feeling in her blandishments—I am an attractive man, not overold—I knew she had already asked my lad and been refused, while the cockney was too small. Nor did I say nó or yes to her, and there the matter rested.

That good woman, the English spinster, interrupted us with a command for me to rest. 'Twas she who had nursed me through my illness, who always had a smile on her lips for the dour, old Scotch wanderer—and she a real lady, too!

It was again the voice of the savage that woke me, toward evening, and he was singing joyously:

"Back from the sea,
Washed clean come we,
As the bats from their day-sleep awake.
Then a long moon through,
Painted anew,
Our tribute we from the jungle take.
Lemur and butterfly,
Kite in the azure sky,
Sambur and serpent,
Weaver-bird 'neath its tent,
Joy, joy with us for we,
Washed clean come back to thee,
Back from the sea."

One by one the elephants were stabled in their individual enclosures, the bars of ironwood that confined them let down, and forage of sugar-cane they themselves had carried apportioned out to them. Then the son of Kratas came and smiled down on me where I lay on my pallet of palm-leaves.

"Hail, Freeman *tuan*," he greeted in the slurring consonants of the Ida'an tongue, "it is well that you are better. Those with you I cannot understand nor they me, so that it is hard to make them serve Them as they should be served."

"Soon I shall be well and we will all leave you, O son of Kratas," I answered, "leave you to go back to our own land."

Complete surprise—anger hardening into set purpose—came over his features, and so changed the savage's expression as to bring vividly back to me the face of Dillingame, his English father.

"You cannot leave me, Freeman *tuan*," he spoke in tones of absolute authority. "I need you all to serve Them. You could not think of deserting Them when they can use you. It would be wicked. Each shall care for one elephant, and you, Freeman *tuan*, shall ride upon the neck of the largest as is shown on the painted walls."

It sounds ridiculous, but yet in no manner of speaking could I call it a pleasant situation. Unquestionably the son of Kratas believed just as honestly we would be committing a sin by not worshiping the elephants as did the Roman emperors when they made living torches out of the Christians who defied the old gods. Also, like the Roman emperors, he had the power on his side: a long knife and the native blow-gun shooting deadly poisoned darts. And, losh, the strength of him! The Honorable Archie was a great, braw

man, but I doubted me he would be but a bairn in the clutch of yon savage.

I had no answer ready and I made none. Indeed he gave me no opportunity, but slipped away to some task of caring for the five great beasts, nor did I see him again until the women had prepared food.

Meanwhile I held a council. In a few words I outlined our position and emphasized the fact that unreasonable as the savage seemed, from his point of view, which I could perfectly understand, he was not unreasonable at all.

The Honorable Archie laughed at the idea of being kept in bondage, though he was plainly angry, and dismissed it with the statement that as soon as I was well enough to travel, he would knock the savage down, bind him if necessary, and we would then do as we pleased.

This appealed mightily to Bob, and he instantly broke in with the suggestion that we could then make off with all the treasure.

My laddie promptly lit on him, announcing nothing would be taken away from inside the painted walls that we had not brought there, and the little man, trembling with rage and fear, subsided.

Leonora did not contribute a word, just sat sullenly silent, a beautiful, evil-looking thing, but Maud had a very great deal to say. Did we not think it would be a wonderful thing could we convert the handsome savage to Christianity! As for her, she would be willing to suffer anything could she make him see the light, wean him from his heathen worship of dumb beasts!

Then, imbued with faith, he could go through the jungle teaching all he met, carry the word to tribes a white man had never seen. Losh, but she was enthusiastic! A good lassie, a rare good lassie, but her plan did not seem to me, in a manner of speaking, hopeful or a solution of our difficulties.

The spinster, a most comfortable body and very cheerful, ended the discussion with the sensible statement that there was nothing we could do at present, but must wait until my strength came back so I could travel.

At that point the son of Kratas stepped in among us, told me that the morrow we would paint Them anew, snatched up some food, and disappeared into the place where he slept overlooking the elephant stables.

Jungle fever is a cruel, cruel thing. The morning I was again weaker than a newborn bairn. All that day I lay helpless. First the son of Kratas came to me and told me how he had apportioned us among his beasts. Bob was to care for the white one, to the Honorable Archie was assigned the largest, and the three women were each to tend one of the others; seeing to it that her charge had its portion of forage and was watered each evening from great, bronze pails that it was a strong man's job to even lift.

What was there for me to answer to this! I did hit on the expedient of telling him that it would take me many days to teach the women their task as they were slow of understanding, but there was nothing for the men to do but to obey. The Honorable Archie fortunately took it rather as a joke, and agreed, for the time being, not to rebel, but promised himself "to take it out of the colored gentleman's hide later."

The cockney took my orders very badly and openly rebelled. It was in vain, however, for I called Archie back and threatened him with death did he not obey.

The rest of the day was very hazy to me, but I was dimly conscious that the elephants were being repainted, the savage getting the colors from roots he crushed in a rude stone press. I saw that Leonora and Bob were much together, and laughed to myself at Maud who, in the evening, was teaching the savage to put up his hands, palms joined in the attitude of prayer. He seemed interested in the play, though I could plainly see by the way he flung out his arms that he associated it with swimming, but the mouse of a lassie smiled upon him delightedly.

Before daylight the next morning the voice of the son of Kratas awoke us:

"The jungle whispers to the sea:
'Now they do come,' and blithesomely
The waters answer back again:
'Yes, they do come.' A little rain
Ripens the flowers to fragrance sweet,
The flowers to clothe Them head to feet."

"Freeman *tuan*, Freeman *tuan*," he called happily, "this is a day of great joy when They wear the brightest of the jungle until set of sun. Wake all that the wreaths may be woven quickly and with gladness."

I woke all, and had the situation been different it might have been to gladness.

The elephants were loaded down with masses of flowers; wax-white great moth orchids, jasmine, wild roses, blue flag, a riotous mass of color heaved all together as though spring had suddenly burst forth in that one spot. The savage put flowers in every one's hands save mine, and showed them how they were to be twisted into a wreath of bloom, himself working swiftly and deftly while he sang over and over again:

"The painted walls show plain, show plain,
The day's dear task, in, out, again,
Twist the blossoms with tender care,
Fashion the wreaths that They shall wear."

Sleepy-eyed in the drizzle of sunrise, the two men and three women fumbled with the wreaths while the beautiful, naked savage urged them on, not angry at their slowness so full was he with the joy of his task, but rather in amazement that they, too, did not effervesce with gladness.

They didn't, though; quite the contrary; it was noon before the garlands suited him; and I must say the elephants looked rather bored when they were hung with them.

Then began a day-long marching and countermarching, the great beasts following docilely one after the other in triangles, squares, circles, and geometrical figures of which I do not even know the names. It was deadly monotonous, but one thing impressed me in spite of myself. The immense rock-floored court in which they maneuvered was worn down in paths forming these same figures.

How many times and by how many elephants throughout the ages had this strange ceremonial been carried on! Another thing made me grow gray inside with apprehension. The son of Kratas, whenever he passed near her, never failed to smile upon Maud, who sat wearily on a block of stone watching, and she, poor, innocent lassie, always smiled bravely back at him. I called her away only to have him summon her back, but she soon curled up where she sat and went to sleep like a tired kitten.

I felt infinitely better and stronger, but a little stupid, as one is apt to be after a bout with fever, or I should have fathomed the reason for Bob's gruesome amusement.

He was killing cobras, scouring the thousand rooms within the painted walls for them, and having collected fully twenty, cut off their heads with a sharp stone, and threw the bodies outside the walls.

I watched him dully and understandingly as he split a hollow bamboo and laboriously bored holes the length of one section with thorns hardened in the fire. The Englishwoman had sent Archie off into the jungle with his great bow to shoot a pheasant from which to brew me broth. Leonora was fashioning small bags out of her petticoat. I knew they were meant to contain treasure from the pile of loot, but the idea did not affect me one way or the other.

It was very hot. I slept.

It was nearly dark when a soft hand on my forehead made me open my eyes, and broth was held to my lips. I drank it slowly, thanked the Englishwoman, and then was conscious that the son of Kratas was sitting cross-legged before me patiently waiting an opportunity to speak. As always, he was the smiling embodiment

of happiness, and I could not help but smile back at the pure beauty of the jasmine-crowned savage.

"Freeman *tuan,*" he began, "you are old and wise, were a slave of my father now long dead." I opened my mouth to object at this point, then let the ridiculous statement pass. "You see how sweet and happy is life within the painted walls, how each day what is shown upon them is faithfully performed. Now I am going to do something that is not limned in color on the stone. I take to myself a mate, the woman who is like unto *plandox,* the mouse-deer, and who has shown that she loves me."

## CHAPTER VII.

### PUNISHMENT.

WAS it not awful! True, I had dimly feared this when the poor, good lassie had plotted to make a Christian of him, but the actual realization of my fears struck me dumb, so that I sat staring at the savage without a word. And I realized I must speak. The look of obstinate purpose I remembered so well from Dillingame, the Englishman, was slowly spreading over the features of his son.

"'Tis—'tis well," I managed to say while I collected my ideas. "Much honor you do her, but would it not be better to mate with the other woman, she who is as strong as a man and would bear you splendid sons?"

"I had thought of mating with her also," he acknowledged simply, "but They take not two mates, so therefore must not I. The strong woman shall be a slave to *Plandox,* my mouse-deer."

There was nothing to say. The best I could hope for was to gain time.

"Let it be three days hence," I announced in my most pompous and impressive manner, "and do you prepare Them for a great ceremony."

I could see that he did not understand the reason for a delay, but the idea of a ceremony appealed to him—he was daft over 'em—and he rose and majestically withdrew.

I told no one of this proposition, not even Archie, least of all Maud herself. I knew my laddie would jump on the savage without a moment's hesitation, and I feared me that it would be his last jump. It was up to me to devise a way out of the horrible predicament, and it must all be handled secretly.

Then Bob appeared on the scene, showed me something, and offered me a solution as horrible as the situation itself.

The bloody-minded little cockney had devised out of the foul depths of his wicked mind a most awful weapon. From the heads of the cobras he had slain he dissected out the fangs with the poison-bags attached, inserted them in a split bamboo, the deadly points protruding through holes bored for that purpose, fashioning a wand one stroke of which would send the deadly venom squirting through the hollow teeth, whose slightest scratch spelled death.

It was a ghastly conception, and his suggestion was that I employ it against the son of Kratas, since the savage never allowed the little villain (nor Archie) to approach close enough to him.

My first instinct was to curse Bob from the bottom of my heart, then I held myself in check. After all, it would only be adding the sin of murder to my already overburdened conscience, and anything was better than that that poor lassie should be martyred actually through her attempt to accomplish good.

However, I sent him away quickly with a command to come to me again in the morning, and watched him join Leonora and show her his terrible weapon.

There was no sleep for me that night. Hour after hour I sat pondering over our unbelievable predicament, and cursing the fates that had weakened me with fever at this very crisis. Rain fell steadily for a time, then the moon came out lighting the ancient city with its deceptive radiance.

The jungle woke with hummings, howls, cries, the scream of some woodland creature a victim to the unending struggle for existence that goes on within the gloom of every tropical forest. A steady minor beneath all the other sounds came the muttered soliloquy of the elephants and the ceaseless shifting of their great feet on the stone floor of the stables. A big *kalong* bat flew across the open space in front of me, then something else moving caught and held my attention.

Two easily recognized figures were stealing toward the elephants' quarters, the figures of Bob and Leonora, both of them loaded down with loot from the treasure-chamber, and the cockney carried his terrible weapon in his right hand.

The little man paused, turned toward the place where my laddie slept, and the Gem Woman whispered tensely to him:

"Don't do it, darling! Let us hurry! Have you not the treasure and me? Why risk everything for the sake of revenge! Is it not revenge enough that you have won the heart of the woman he loves!"

"I'll just touch 'im with this," the bloodthirsty little fiend whispered, shaking the deadly bamboo wand. "I 'ave to pay 'im for all 'e 'as done to me."

"Archie!" I screamed out. "Archie!" and he was instantly by my side.

"Fool!" snapped the woman, and ran toward the stables, but the little cockney still hesitated and lingered.

My laddie stepped toward him, but paused as I shouted cut:

"Keep away, keep away!" Then to Bob: "Drop that stick or I'll rouse the savage."

"Go to 'ell," he snarled, and came a step forward raising his wand.

There were squeals of fear deepening into a roar of trumpeting from the elephants. Bob turned, with a final curse, and ran toward the sounds. So quickly and silently that it seemed as though he must have been transmuted from the moonbeams, the son of Kratas was before me, caught sight of the fleeing cockney, sped in pursuit.

It was but a step to the stables, and we all peered down into the enclosure that held the white elephant, and whence came a frantic trumpeting. The bars of the entrance were down, Leonora was upon its back, one hand clutched in the diamond net, the other belaboring it with the iron goad. The great beast had balked, stood facing inward, its feet firmly planted, its trunk raised, while Bob, livid with fury, tried in vain to make it turn.

The son of Kratas took in the entire situation at a glance. Raising his voice, he gave a command in the high falsetto of an unknown tongue. The elephant whipped down its trunk, circled the cockney's waist, and swung him high in the air. It was all over in a second.

The little man, shrieking, struck twice with his deadly bamboo-stick straight into the mouth of the beast, then lay crushed, trampled into a shapeless mass that no one could have guessed had once been a man.

The rest is indistinct, hazy. Some way Leonora was again among us spitting fury and disappointment like a wildcat. Archie was carrying Maud, who had fainted, in his arms, and her aunt was leading me away by the hand.

"Go and sleep, if ye can," ordered the son of Kratas; "the morning shall see punishment for all."

But in the morning the beautiful, jasmine-crowned savage had no thought for punishment, knew naught but grief. The white elephant lay dead within its enclosure, its great bulk above the crushed remnants of the tiny wicked human whose diabolical venom-loaded weapon had caused its end.

A child grieves bitterly over a broken toy, grieves to depths of wo that a grown man cannot fathom. Imagine, then, the sorrow of this child of the jungle at the loss of what he idolized as a god—of what took the place with him of parents, friends, companions—worship itself.

All day long he crouched by the great, motionless beast moaning and weeping, weeping and moaning like a mother over

her dead bairn. Losh, but 'twas a sight surpassing sadness, and made my heart bleed. It was only as the sun was setting that I could make him hear my voice, respond to my touch, but then he followed me and obeyed me like a little child.

I made him pack the jeweled net on another elephant, then took him to where I slept, and talked to him all the night.

The burden of my discourse was that the morrow we would have a great ceremony, all should help dig a pit into which the other elephants would drag their dead brother, and there he should lie 'neath flowers, and a cairn of stones be raised high above him. Over and over I repeated this till the sound of the same words half hypnotized us, and toward morning we both slept.

Misfortune seemed to have singled out the son of Kratas, for when the sun was up the elephant on which the jeweled net had been placed was gone—and so was Leonora.

I expected—braced myself for another burst of grief—but had not counted on the blood of the Englishman, Dillingame, that ran in the savage's veins. He took this new misfortune perfectly quietly, cast about for the spoor, and then directed me in a tone I dared not disobey to have all mount the elephants.

Swiftly the cavalcade of three, I on the same beast with the son of Kratas, went down the stone road, and at its end we found the lost elephant happily bathing in the sea. A hole marked the place where Leonora's jewel-chest had been hidden, and the boat we had dragged up on the sand was gone, with it the gold net set with yellow diamonds.

With a high-pitched call the jungle-man sent the remaining beasts into the water, stood for a long time motionless, silent, and then spoke:

"Misfortune, Freeman *tuan*, you have brought to me; death and unhappiness. It is right that there should be punishment—a punishment the heaviest that I can devise. This it shall be: never more shall you look upon Them, never more know the joy of caring for Them. I send you back to your own land. This very day you shall depart as you came."

"Be it as you have ordained, O son of the priestess of the Land of Blood," I answered, trying to keep the joy and relief out of my voice.

Again he pondered, then once more spoke:

"*Plandox*, the mouse-deer woman, I shall keep. Now get ye gone in the other boat that lies yonder," and he took a step toward Maud.

The blood froze in my veins and I gathered together my strength for a struggle I knew was hopeless. The savage's gesture toward Maud had been unmistakable, however, and the Honorable Archie was before me. He gave no warning of his purpose, struck out hard and swift as lightning, yet the savage caught his wrist half way of the blow and hurled him to the ground, where he lay still, blood running from where his head had struck against a stone.

Then happened the strangest of all things. As the jungle-man bent to finish his work Maud sprang between them, a lassie no longer, but a woman, or rather a wild thing defending her mate.

"You sha'n't touch him," she screamed, "you heathen thing! You sha'n't touch him," and she confronted the wild man fearlessly, a miniature embodiment of desperate courage.

The son of Kratas hesitated and glanced back at me.

"Does she not wish to be my mate and dwell with Them?" he asked.

"No," I answered. "No."

He studied for a moment, then raised his head.

"I do not understand," he said simply. "I think you are all evil—evil itself. Do you go from here quickly or I shall summon Them to trample upon you."

Archie was only stunned; a dash of water in his face brought him to. Well out from the shore we rested on our oars, looked back.

The four elephants, "washed clean," were filing into the jungle, the son of Kratas riding behind the ears of the largest one on whose head flashed a jeweled cap, but the savage's own head was bare; he had torn away his crown of jasmine bloom and cast it in the dust.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MORNING AND AFTERNOON.

THE Sarawak Queen looked fair bonny, old weather-beaten tramp though she was, when, at noontime, we reached her side.

The other life-boat was pulling at its painter tied to the gangway ladder, and I heaved a sigh of relief as I saw it. Though, in no manner of speaking, could I be called fond of Leonora, yet I was glad she had arrived safely on shipboard. We had all seen enough of death, and then her presence rather preserved the proprieties.

Two women and two men alone on a boat might lead to talk; were there three women, people would surmise one a chaperon.

Even now that we were safe from the wilderness perils, it was no easy task that confronted us. Getting up steam on the Sarawak Queen was out of the question for two men, and we had to depend upon the one big sail amidships to pull us away from the coast. Two days we lay waiting for a favorable wind, and then let go the anchor-chains and swung out to sea.

It was surprising the amount of loot the Gem Woman had managed to get away with in the bags made from her petticoat, and all of it in the form of jewels. And in addition she had the golden net studded with immense yellow diamonds, each stone a fortune in itself, and the whole worth enough money to pay off the entire national debt of many a small kingdom.

The entire first day, as we swung at anchor, she spent admiring it, spreading it out to catch the rays of the sun so that it flashed in a dazzle of light that was fair blinding. The way she loved those cold, senseless stones was awful to contemplate—made the savage's worship of the elephants seem a gentle, human thing by contrast. Finally the net was tied up tight in oilcloth—it made a big armful—and kept in the empty upper bunk of her stateroom.

The second day the woman began to make love to Archie, courting him openly before us all as though we were not there, till I fair blushed with embarrassment and fled to the other end of the ship. The crowning touch came at dinner, that evening, when she deliberately leaned over the table and kissed him.

"Before we are married, Lion," she said, "I want your betrothal gift to me to be that tiara of yellow stones on which, cruel and dear one, you bought the option."

I gasped; the Honorable Archie turned purple; but it was Maud who acted in the most astounding manner. For a moment the lassie looked exactly as she had when standing between my laddie and death in the form of the son of Kratas. She rose from her seat, blasted Leonora with a glance, and said to Archie, perfectly calmly, as though, in a manner of speaking, she was asking him to pass her the salt:

"I hate and despise you!"

Then without another word she fled to her cabin.

"Will you come on deck with me for a moment, Mme. Vladmir?" asked the Honorable Archie very formally, and they went up the iron stairs.

I gave the situation some thought; then, though I am a Scotchman and therefore cautious with words, said to that pleasant body, the Englishwoman:

"I doubt me if yon lassie meant exactly as she spoke. I doubt me very much if she hates and despises my laddie!"

"I don't doubt me at all," her aunt answered, "but don't let's worry over it.

Would the moonlight not be very pretty from the bow of the boat?"

The moonlight proved very pretty, the night soft and alluring, and, somehow, I felt quite like a young man again, as though the years had suddenly rolled from my shoulders in the same manner that the fever had left me. Perhaps I talked a bit wildly. They say the moon breeds madness. And I have unquestionably a way with women—but no matter.

We did not see Maud again that night, and there was sign of wind coming in the morning from the jumping of the fish. One splash especially was so loud it fair startled me.

Down in our cabin the Honorable Archie had that set look on his face that I had long ago learned to associate with those icy cold quarrels between him and the Gem Vampire. I said no word, but it was on the tip of my tongue to ask him had she kissed him again.

The temptation was nearly irresistible, in the same category as the strange thought that sometimes comes into a man's mind on the street: what would happen if, for no reason at all, he suddenly slapped an innocent passer-by in the face? I did not speak, though. To be perfectly frank, I was afraid.

Hardly had I closed my eyes when the whole ship echoed to a frightful scream. We were both out into the mess-room with one jump, and there stood Leonora, in her night-gear, her face convulsed.

"It's gone," she shrieked. "Gone, gone! My yellow stones are gone!"

We never found them, though we ransacked the ship from stem to stern. How they disappeared will always remain a mystery to me.

Once, many years later, I even thought that Archie might have taken them to punish yon hussy for her forwardness, and so hinted to him. He wanted to fight me. They were gone, and we never saw them again. The Gem Woman grieved beyond words, and 'twas that good lassie, Maud, who tried most to console her.

Once we were clear of the coast our luck changed. The same day a tramp steamer picked up the Sarawak Queen and took her in tow, and that afternoon we all transferred to a P. and O. liner that ultimately landed us at Singapore.

Leonora left us there—after a last attempt to wheedle the sixty-thousand-pound gaud out of Archie—to keep an engagement at Petrograd. She never did get that yellow diamond hair-dress I happen to know, because, when the Honorable Archie's option expired, it was bought by an American who had made millions from tinning hogs—a pork-packer they called him through courtesy.

It was a sad thing to think of leaving those two women with whom we had been through so many perils, and the day we landed at Singapore I spent entirely with that pleasing body, the spinster. We saw the city, and stopped in, for a bit, in the afternoon, at the home of a Scotch clergyman I happened to know.

In the evening I met the Honorable Archie by appointment at the Soldiers and Civilians' Club. We sat down at a table without much to say. (I did hate to leave him.) And then it came over me that 'twas many, many weeks since liquor had passed our lips, so I said:

"Laddie, let us have one drink."

"Andy," he answered, beckoning a steward, "we will have one, just one."

The Scotch came and we sipped our highballs slowly.

"Will you no' have another?" I suggested politely. "You will not mind if I don't join you?"

"I will not," he said firmly, then with a rush, "because I take, this night, the train up through India, then ship to England with my wife. I married Maud this morning."

"Well," I said, "'tis, in a manner of speaking, a coincidence. I am also taking yon night-train with Maud's aunt, whom I married this afternoon."

**(The end.)**

# The Holy Scare

## by George Washington Ogden

**Author of "The Bondboy," "The Crucible of Courage," "Cowards," "The Blood Lender," etc.**

### SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

SAUL CHADRON, president of the Drovers' Association, hires Mark Thorn, a gunman and professional assassin, to throw a "holy scare" into the homesteaders by shooting certain of their leaders. He gives him a list of their names, Alan Macdonald's leading. Frances Landcraft, daughter of the colonel commanding the near-by army post, finds the slip and, without knowing what it is, gives it to Alan. He falls in love with her, and she, though the cattlemen have tried to make it appear that he is a "rustler" and cattle thief, is much attracted to him. He attends a cattlemen's masked ball, but is discovered and narrowly escapes. The next day he comes to the post, goes to the colonel, and asks to be permitted to pay court to Frances. The colonel, amazed and angry, refuses, telling him that the girl is already engaged to Major King. Alan, nothing daunted, leaves. Frances, in a heated interview with her father, declines to marry King and tells him she has already broken her engagement with him.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THROWING THE SCARE.

BANJO GIBSON arrived at Macdonald's place the following day from Sam Hatcher's ranch across the river, bringing news that three homesteaders on that side had been killed in the past two days. They had been shot from the willow thickets as they worked in their fields or rode along the dim-marked highways. Banjo could not give any further particulars; he did not know the victims' names.

Macdonald understood what it meant, and whose hand was behind the slaying of those home-makers of the wilderness. It was not a new procedure in the cattle barons' land; this scourge had been foreshadowed in that list of names which Frances Landcraft had given him.

The word had gone out to them to be on guard. Now death had begun to leap upon them from the roadside grass. Perhaps his own turn would come to-night or to-morrow. He could not be more watchful than his neighbors had been; no man could close all the doors.

The price of life in that country for such men as himself always had been unceasing vigilance. When a man stood guard over himself day and night he could do no more, and even at that he was almost certain, some time or another, to leave a chink open through which the waiting blow might fall. After a time one became hardened to this condition of life. The strain of watching fell away from him; it became a part of his daily habit, and a man grew careless about securing the safeguards upon his life by and by.

**This story began in the All-Story Weekly for January 13.**

"Them fellers," said Banjo, feeling that he had lowered himself considerably in carrying the news involving their swift end to Macdonald, "got about what was comin' to 'em, I reckon, Mac. Why don't a man like you hitch up with Chadron or Hatcher, or one of the good men of this country, and git out from among them runts that's nosin' around in the ground for a livin' like a drove of hogs?"

"Every man to his liking, Banjo," Macdonald returned, "and I don't like the company you've named."

They never quarreled over the point, but Banjo never ceased to urge the reformation, such as he honestly believed it to be, upon Macdonald at every visit. The little troubadour felt that he was doing a generous and friendly turn for a fallen man, and squaring his own account with Macdonald in thus laboring for his redemption.

Banjo was under obligation to Macdonald for no smaller matter than his life, the homesteader having rescued him from drowning the past spring when the musician, heading for Chadron's after playing for a dance, had mistaken the river for the road and stubbornly urged his horse into it. On that occasion Banjo's wits had been mixed with liquor, but his sense of gratitude had been perfectly clear ever since. Macdonald's door was the only one in the nesters' colony that stress or friendship ever had constrained him to enter. Even as it was, with all the big debt of gratitude owing, his intimacy with a man who had opened an irrigation ditch was a thing of which he did not boast abroad.

Banjo made but a night's stop of it with Macdonald. Early in the morning he was in the saddle again, with a dance ahead of him to play for that night at a ranch twenty miles or more away. He lingered a little after shaking hands with his host, trying the violin case as if to see that it was secure, and fidgeting in his saddle, and holding back on the start. Macdonald could see that there was something unsaid in the little man's mind which gave him an uneasiness, like indigestion.

"What is it, Banjo?" he asked, to let it be known that he understood.

"Mac, did you ever hear tell of a feller named Mark Thorn?" Banjo inquired, looking about him with fearful caution, lowering his voice almost to a whisper.

"Yes, I've heard of him."

"Well, he's in this country."

"Are you sure about that, Banjo?" Macdonald's face was troubled; he moved nearer the musician as he made the inquiry, and laid his hand on his arm.

"He's here, he's the feller you've got to watch out for. He cut acrost the road yisterday afternoon when I was comin' down here, and when he seen me he stopped, for I used to know him up North and he knew it wasn't no use to try to duck and hide his murderin' face from me. He told me he was ranchin' up in the North now, and he'd come down here to collect some money Chadron owed him on an old bill."

"Pretty slim kind of a story. But he's here to collect money from Chadron, all right, and give him value received. What kind of a looking man is he?"

"He's long and lean, like a rail, with a kind of a bend in him when he walks, and the under lid of his left eye drawed like you'd pulled it down and stuck a tack in it. He's wearin' a cap, and he's kind of whiskered up, like he'd been layin' out some time."

"I'd know him," Macdonald nodded.

"You couldn't miss him in a thousand, Mac. Well, I must be rackin' along."

Banjo scarcely had passed out of sight when three horsemen came galloping to Macdonald's gate. They brought news of a fresh tragedy, and that in the immediate neighborhood. A boy had been shot down that morning while doing chores on a homestead a little way across the river. He was the son of one of the men on the death-list, and these men, the father among them, had come to enlist Macdonald's aid in running down the slayer.

The boy's mother had seen the assassin

hastening away among the scant bushes on the slope above the house. The description that she gave of him left no doubt in Macdonald's mind of his identity. It was Mark Thorn, the cattlemen's contract killer, the homesteaders' scourge.

It was a fruitless search that day, seeking old Mark Thorn among the hills which rose brokenly a few miles back from the river and climbed to the knees of the mountains in ever-mounting surge. A devil's darning-needle in a cornfield would have been traced and cornered as quickly as that slippery thin old killer of men, it seemed.

As if to show his contempt for those who hunted him, and to emphasize his own feeling of security, he slipped down to the edge of the fenced lands and struck down another homesteader that afternoon, leaving him dead at the handles of his plow.

Those homesteaders were men of rare courage and unbending persistency in the ordinary affairs of life, but three days of empty pursuit of this monster left them out of heart. The name of Mark Thorn in itself was sufficient to move a thrill of terror and repulsion. He had left his red mark in many places through the land dominated by the cattle interests of the Northwest. He had come at length to stand for an institution of destruction, rather than an individual, which there was no power strong enough to circumvent, nor force cunning enough to entrap.

There never was a tale of monster, wolf-men, bloody-muzzled great beasts of dark forests, that struck deeper fear into the hearts of primitive peasantry than this modern ogre moved in the minds and hearts of those striving settlers in the cattle lands. Mark Thorn was a shadowy, far-reaching thing to them, distorted in their imaginings out of the semblance of a man. He had grown, in the stories founded on facts horrible enough without enlargement, into a fateful destroyer, from whom no man upon whom he had set his mark could escape.

Little wonder then that fear for the safety of their wives and children made the faces of these men gray as they rode the sage, combing the hollows and hills for the sight of old Mark Thorn. One by one they began to drop out of the posse, until of the fourteen besides Macdonald who had ridden in the hunt on the second day, only five remained on the evening of the third.

It was no use looking for Mark Thorn, those said, shaking gloomy heads. When he came into a country on a contract to kill, it was like a curse predestined which the power of man could not turn aside. He had the backing of the Drovers' Association, which had an arm as long in that land as the old Persian king's. He would strike there, like the ghost of all the devils in men that ever had lived on their fellows' blood, and slink away as silently as a wolf out of the sheepfold at dawn when his allotted task was done.

Better to go home and guard what was left, they said. All of them were men for a fight, but it was one thing to stand up to something that a man could see, and quite another to fight blindfolded and in the dark. Catching Mark Thorn was like trying to ladle moonlight with a sieve. The country wasn't worth it, they were beginning to believe. When Mark Thorn came in, it was like the vultures flying ahead of the last devastating plague.

The man whose boy had been shot down beside the little grass-roofed barn was the last to leave.

"I'll stick to it for a year, Alan, if you think it's any use," he said.

He was a gaunt man, with sunken cheeks and weary eyes; gray, worn, unwashed and old: one of the earth's disinherited who believed that he had come into his rood of land at last. Now the driving shadow of his restless fate was on him again. Macdonald could see that it was heavy in his mind to hitch up and stagger on into the west, which was already red with the sunset of his day.

Macdonald was moved by a great com-

passion for this old man, whose hope had been snatched away from him by the sting of a bullet in the dawn. He laid his hand on the old homesteader's sagging thin shoulder and poured the comfort of a strong man's sympathy into his empty eyes.

"Go on back, Tom, and look after the others," he said. "Do your chores by dark, morning and night, and stick close to cover all day, and watch for him. I'll keep on looking. I started out to get that old hyena, and I'll get him. Go on home."

The old man's eyes kindled with admiration. But it died as quickly as it had leaped up, and he shook his long hair with a sigh.

"You can't do nothin' ag'in' him all alone, Alan."

"I think I'll have a better chance alone than in a crowd, Tom. There's no doubt that there were too many of us, crashing through the brush and setting ourselves up against the sky-line every time we rode up a hill. I'll tackle him alone. Tell the neighbors to live under cover till they hear I've either got him or he's got me. In case it turns out against me, they can do whatever seems best to them."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### AFOOT AND ALONE.

MARK THORN had not killed anybody since shooting the man at the plow. There were five deaths to his credit on that contract, although none of the fallen was on the cattlemen's list of desirables to be removed.

Five days had passed without a tragedy, and the homesteaders were beginning to draw breath in the open again, in the belief that Macdonald must have driven the slayer out of the country. Nothing had been seen or heard of Macdonald since the evening that he parted company with Tom Lassiter, father of the murdered boy.

Macdonald, in the interval, was hard on the old villain's trail. He had picked it up on the first day of his lone-handed hunt, and once he had caught a glimpse of Thorn as he dodged among the red willows on the river, but the sight had been too transitory to put in a shot. It was evident now that Thorn knew that he was being hunted by a single pursuer. More than that, there were indications written in the loose earth where he passed, and in the tangled brushwood where he skulked, that he had stopped running away and had turned to hunt the hunter.

For two days they had been circling in a constantly tightening ring, first one leading the hunt, then the other. Trained and accustomed as he was to life under those conditions, Thorn had not yet been able to take even a chance shot at his clinging pursuer.

Macdonald was awake to the fact that this balance in his favor could not be maintained long. As it was, he ascribed it more to luck than skill on his part. This wild beast in human semblance must possess all the wild beast's cunning; there would be a rift left open in this straining game of hide and seek which his keen eyes would see at no distant hour.

The afternoon of that day was worn down to the hock. Macdonald had been creeping and stooping, running, panting, and lying concealed from the first gleam of dawn. Whether by design on the part of Thorn, or merely the blind leading of the hunt, Macdonald could not tell, the contest of wits had brought them within sight of Alamito ranch-house.

Resting a little while with his back against a ledge which insured him from surprise, Macdonald looked out from the hills over the wide-spanning valley, the farther shore of which was laved in a purple mist as rich as the dye of some Oriental weaving. He felt a surge of indignant protest against the greedy injustice of that manorial estate, the fair house glistening in the late sun among the white-limbed cottonwoods. There Saul

Chadron sat, like some distended monster, his hands spread upon more than he could honestly use, or his progeny after him for a thousand years, growling and snapping at all whose steps lagged in passing, or whose weary eyes turned longingly toward those grassy vales.

There had been frost for many nights past; the green of the summerland had merged into a yellow brown, now gold beneath the slanting sunbeams. A place of friendly beauty and sequestered peace, where a man might come to take up his young dreams, or stagger under the oppression of his years to put them down and rest. It seemed so, in the light of that failing afternoon.

But the man who sat with his back against the ledge, his ears strained to find the slightest hostile sound, his roaming eyes always coming back, with unconscious alertness and frowning investigation, to the nearer objects in the broken foreground, had tasted beneath the illusive crust of that land, and the savor was bitter upon his lips. He questioned what good there was to be got out of it, for him or those for whom he had taken up the burden, for many a weary year to come.

The gloom of the situation bore heavily upon him; he felt the uselessness of his fight. He recalled the words of Frances Landcraft: "There must be millions behind the cattlemen." He felt that he never had realized the weight of millions, iniquitous millions, before that hour. They formed a barrier which his shoulder seemed destined never to overturn.

There he was, on that broad heath, afoot and alone, hunting, and hunted by, a slayer of men, one who stalked him as he would a wolf or a lion for the bounty upon his head. And in the event that a lucky shot should rid the earth of that foul thing, how much would it strengthen his safety, and his neighbors', and fasten their weak hold upon the land?

Little, indeed. Others could be hired out of those uncounted millions of the cattlemen's resources to finish what Mark Thorn had begun. The night raids upon their fields would continue, the slanders against them would spread and grow. Colonel Landcraft believed him to be what malicious report had named him; there was not a doubt of that. And what Frances thought of him since that misadventure of the glove, it was not hard to guess.

But that was not closed between them, he told himself, as he had told himself before, times unnumbered. There was a final word to be said, in the right time and place. The world would turn many times between then and the Christmas holidays, when Frances was to become the bride of another, according to the colonel's plans.

Macdonald was weary from his night vigils and stealthy prowlings by day, and hungry for a hot meal. Since he had taken the trail of Mark Thorn alone he had not kindled a fire. Now the food that he had carried with him was done; he must turn back home for a fresh supply, and a night's rest.

It did not matter much, anyway, he said, feeling the uselessness of his life and strife in that place. It was a big and unfriendly land, a hard and hopeless place for a man who tried to live in defiance of the established order there. Why not leave it, with its despair and heart-emptiness? The world was full enough of injustices elsewhere if he cared to set his hand to right them.

But a true man did not run away under fire, nor a brave one block out a task and then shudder, and slink away, when he stood off and saw the immensity of the thing that he had undertaken. Besides all these considerations, which in themselves formed insuperable reasons against retreat, there had been some big talk into the ear of Frances Landcraft. There was no putting down what he had begun. His dream had taken root there; it would be cruel cowardice to wrench it up.

He got up, the sun striking him on the face, from which the west wind pressed back his hat-brim as if to let the daylight

see it. The dust of his travels was on it, and the roughness of his new beard, and it was harsh in some of its lines, and severe as an ashlar from the craftsman's tool. But it was a man's face, with honor in it; the sun found no weakness there, no shame concealed under the sophistries and wiles by which men beguile the world.

Macdonald looked away across the valley, past the white ranch-house, beyond the slow river which came down from the northwest in toilsome curves, whose gray shores and bars were yellow in that sunlight as the sands of famed Pactolus. His breast heaved with the long inspiration which flared his thin nostrils like an Arab's scenting rain; he revived with a new vigor as the freedom of the plains met his eyes and made them glad. That was his place, his land; its troubles were his to bear, its peace his to glean when it should ripen. It was his inheritance; it was his place of rest. The lure of that country had a deep seat in his heart; he loved it for its perils and its pains. It was like a sweetheart to bind and call him back. A man makes his own Fortunate Isles, as that shaggy old gray poet knew so well.

For a moment Mark Thorn was forgotten as Macdonald repeated in low voice above his breath:

"Lo! These are the isles of the watery miles
That God let down from the firmament.
Lo! Duty and Love, and a true man's trust;
Your forehead to God and your feet in the dust—"

Yes, that was his country; it had taken hold of him with that grip which no man ever has shaken his heart free from, no matter how many seas he has placed between its mystic lure and his back-straining soul. Its fight was his fight, and there was gladness in the thought.

His alertness as he went down the slope, and the grim purpose of his presence in that forbidding place, did not prevent the pleading of a softer cause, and a sweeter. That rare smile woke in his eyes and unbent for a moment the harshness of his lips as he thought of brown hair sweeping back from a white forehead, and a chin lifted imperiously, as became one born to countenance only the exalted in this life. There was something that made him breathe quicker in the memory of her warm body held a transitory moment in his arms; the recollection of the rose-softness of her lips. All these were waiting in the world that he must win, claimed by another, true. But that was immaterial, he told his heart, which leaped and exulted in the memory of that garden path as if there was no to-morrow, and no such shadow in man's life as doubt.

Of course there remained the matter of the glove. A man might have been expected to die before yielding it to another, as she had said, speaking out of a hot heart, he knew. There was a more comfortable thought for Alan Macdonald as he went down the long slope with the western sun on his face; not a thought of dying for a glove, but of living to win the hand that it had covered.

Chadron's ranch-house was several miles to the westward of him, although it appeared nearer by the trickery of that clear light. He cut his course to bring himself into the public highway—a government road, it was — that ran northward up the river, the road along which Chadron's men had pursued him the night of the ball. He meant to strike it some miles to the north of Chadron's homestead, for he was not looking for any more trouble than he was carrying that day.

He proceeded swiftly, but cautiously, watching for his man. But Mark Thorn did not appear to be abroad in that part of the country. Until sundown Macdonald walked unchallenged, when he struck the highway a short distance south of the point where the trail leading to Fort Shakie branched from it.

Saul Chadron and his daughter Nola came riding out of the Fort Shakie road, their horses in that tireless, swinging gallop which the animals of that rare atmos-

phere can maintain for hours. As he rode, Chadron swung his quirt in unison with the horse's undulations, from side to side across its neck, like a baton. He sat as stiff and solid in his saddle as a carved image. Nola came on neck and neck with him, on the side of the road nearer Macdonald.

Macdonald was carrying a rifle in addition to his side arms, and he was a dusty grim figure to come upon suddenly afoot in the high road. Chadron pulled in his horse and brought it to a stiff-legged stop when he saw Macdonald, who had stepped to the roadside to let them pass. The old cattleman's high-crowned sombrero was pinched to a peak; the wind of his galloping gait had pressed its broad brim back from his tough old weathered face. His white mustache and little dab of pointed beard seemed whiter against the darkness of passion which mounted to his scowling eyes.

"What in the hell 're you up to now?" he demanded, without regard for his companion, who was accustomed, well enough, to his explosions and expletives.

Macdonald gravely lifted his hand to his hat, his eyes meeting Nola's for an instant, Chadron's challenge unanswered. Nola's face flared at this respectful salutation as if she had been insulted. She jerked her horse back a little, as if she feared that violence would follow the invasion of her caste by this fallen and branded man, her pliant waist weaving in graceful balance with every movement of her beast.

Macdonald lowered his eyes from her blazingly indignant face. Her horse was slewed across the narrow road, and he considered between waiting for them to ride on and striking into the shoulder-high sage which grew thick at the roadside there. He thought that she was very pretty in her fairness of hair and skin, and the lake-clear blueness of her eyes. She was riding astride, as all the women in that country rode, dressed in wide pantaloonish corduroys, with twinkling little silver spurs on her heels.

"What 're you prowlin' down here around my place for?" Chadron asked, spurring his horse as he spoke, checking its forward leap with rigid arm, which made a commotion of hoofs and a cloud of dust.

"This is a public highway, and I deny your right to question my motives in it," Macdonald returned calmly.

"Sneakin' around to see if you can lay hands on a horse, I suppose," Chadron said, leaning a little in towering menace toward the man in the road.

Macdonald felt a hot surge of resentment rise to his eyes, so suddenly and so strong that it dimmed his sight. He shut his mouth hard on the words which sprang into it, and held himself in silence until he had commanded his anger.

"I'm hunting," said he, meeting Chadron's eye with meaning look.

"On foot, and waitin' for dark!" the cattleman sneered.

"I'm going on foot because the game I'm after sticks close to the ground. There's no need of naming that game to you—you know what it is."

Macdonald spoke with cutting severity. Chadron's dark face reddened under his steady eyes, and again the big rowels of his spurs slashed his horse's sides, making it bound and trample in threatening charge.

"I don't know anything about your damn low-down business; but I'll tell you this much—if I ever run into you agin down this way, I'll do a little huntin' on my own accord."

"That would be squarer and more to my liking than hiring somebody else to do it for you, Mr. Chadron. Ride on; I don't want to stand here and quarrel with you."

"I'm goin' to clear you nesters out of there up the river"—Chadron waved his hand in the direction of which he spoke—"and put a stop to your rustlin' before another month rolls around. I've stood your fences up there on my land as long as I'm goin' to!"

"I've never had the chance to tell you

before, Mr. Chadron "—Macdonald spoke as respectfully as his deep detestation of the cattleman would allow—" but if you've got any other charge to bring against me except that of homesteading, bring it in a court. I'm ready to face you on it any day."

" I carry my court right here with me," said Chadron, patting his revolver.

" I deny its jurisdiction," Macdonald returned, drawing himself up, a flash of defiance in his clear eyes.

Chadron jerked his head in expression of lofty disdain.

" Go on! Git out of my sight!" he ordered.

" The road is open to you," Macdonald replied.

" I'm not goin' to turn my back on you till you're out of sight."

Chadron bent his great owlish brows in a scowl, laid his hand on his revolver, and whirled his horse in the direction that Macdonald was facing.

Macdonald did not answer. He turned from Chadron, something in his act of going that told the cattleman he was above so mean a suspicion on his part. Nola shifted her horse to let him pass, her elbows tight at her sides, scorn in her lively eyes.

Again Macdonald's hand went to his hat in respectful salute, and again he saw that flash of anger spread in the young woman's cheeks. Her fury blazed in her eyes as she looked at him a moment, and a dull color mounted in his own face as he beheld her foolish and unjustified pride.

Macdonald would have passed her then, but she spurred her horse upon him with sudden-breaking temper, forcing him to spring back quickly to the roadside to escape being trampled. Before he could collect himself in his astonishment, she struck him a whistling blow with her long-thonged quirt across the face.

" You dog!" she said, her clenched little white teeth showing in her parted lips.

Macdonald caught the bridle and pushed her horse back to its haunches, and she, in her reckless anger, struck him across the hand in sharp, quick blows. Her conduct was comparable to nothing but that of an ill-bred child striking one whose situation, he has been told, is the warrant of his inferiority.

The struggle was over in a few seconds, and Macdonald stood free of the little fury, a red welt across his cheek, the back of his hand cut until the blood oozed through the skin in heavy, black drops. Chadron had not moved a hand to interfere on either side. Only now, that the foolish display of Nola's temper was done, he rocked in his saddle and shook the empty landscape with his loud, coarse laugh.

He patted his daughter on the shoulder, like a hunter rewarding a dog. Macdonald walked away from them, the only humiliation that he felt for the incident being that which he suffered for her sake.

It was not so much that a woman had debased herself to the level of a savage—although that hurt him, too—but that her blows had been the expression of the contempt in which the lords of that country held him and his kind. Bullets did not matter so much, for a man could give them back as hot as they came. But there was no answer, as he could see it in that depressing hour, for such a feudal assertion of superiority as this.

It was to the work of breaking the hold of this hard-handed aristocracy which had risen from the grass-roots in the day of its arrogant prosperity—a prosperity founded on usurpation of the rights of the weak and upheld by murder—that he had set his soul. The need of hastening the reformation never had seemed greater to him than on that day, or more hopeless, he admitted in his heart.

For, hour by hour, the work ahead of him appeared to grow greater. Little could be expected, judging by the experiences of the past few days, from those who suffered most. The day of extremest pressure in their poor affairs was being hastened by the cattlemen, as Chadron's threat had foretold. What would they do when the time came to fight or harness

their lean teams and drive on into the west? That was the big question upon which the success or the failure of his work depended.

As he had come down from the hill-side out of the sunshine and peace to meet shadow and violence, so his high spirits, hopes, and intentions seemed, this bitter hour, steeped in sudden gloom. In more ways than one that evening on the white river-road, Alan Macdonald felt that he was afoot and alone.

## CHAPTER IX.

### BUSINESS, NOT COMPANY.

SAUL CHADRON was at breakfast next morning when Maggie, the cook, appeared in the dining-room door and announced a visitor for the señor boss. Maggie's eyes were bulging, and she did a great deal of pantomime with her shapely shoulders to express her combined fright, disgust, and indignation.

Chadron looked up from his ham and eggs, with a considerable portion of the eggs on the blade of his knife, handle-down in one fist, his fork standing like a lightning-rod in the other, and asked her who the man was and what he wanted at that hour of the day. Chadron was eating by lamplight, and alone, according to his thrifty custom of slipping up on the day before it was awake, as if in the hope of surprising it at a vast disadvantage to itself, after his way of handling men and things.

"*Es un extranjero,*" replied Maggie, forgetting her English in her excitement.

"Talk white man, you old sow!" Chadron growled.

"He ees a es-trenger, I do not knowed to heem."

"Tell him to go to the barn and wait; I'll be out there in a minute."

"He will not a-goed, I told heem—whee!" Maggie clamped her hands to her back as if somebody had caught her in a ticklish spot, as she squealed and jumped into the room where the grand duke of the cattlemen's nobility was taking his refreshment.

Chadron had returned to his meal after ordering her to send his visitor to the barn. He was swabbing his knife in the fold of a pancake when Maggie made that frightful, shivering exclamation and jumped aside out of the door. Now he looked up to reprove her, and met the smoky eyes of Mark Thorn peering in from the kitchen.

"What 're you doin' around here, you old— Come in. Shut that door! Git him some breakfast," he ordered, turning to Maggie.

Maggie hung back a moment until Thorn had come into the room, then she shot into the kitchen like a cat through a fence, and slammed the door behind her.

"What in hell do you mean by comin' around here?" Chadron demanded angrily. "Didn't I tell you never to come here, you blink-eyed old snag-skin?"

"You told me," Thorn admitted, putting his rifle down across a chair, drawing another to the table, and seating himself in readiness for the coming meal.

"Then what'd you sneak—"

"News," said Thorn in his brief way.

"Which news?" Chadron brightened hopefully, his implements, clamped in his hairy fists, inviting the first bolt from the heavens.

"I got him last night."

"You got—him?" Chadron lifted himself from his chair on his bent legs in the excitement of the news.

"And I'm through with this job. I've come to cash in, and quit."

"The hell you say!"

"I'm gettin' too old for this kind of work. That feller chased me around till my tongue was hangin' out so fur I stepped on it. I tell you he was—"

"How did you do it?"

Thorn looked at him with a scowl. "Well, I never used a club on a man yit," he said.

"Where did it happen at?"

"Up there at his place. He'd been chasin' me for two days, and when he went back—after grub, I reckon—I

doubled on him. Just as he went in the door I got him. I left him with his dam' feet stickin' out like a shoemaker's sign."

"How fur was you off from him, Mark?"

"Fifty yards, more 'r less."

"Did you go over to him to see if he was finished, or just creased?"

"I never creased a man in my life!" Thorn was indignant over the imputation. Chadron shook his head in doubt, in discredit, in gloomy disbelief.

"If you didn't go up to him and turn him over and look at the whites of his eyes, you ain't sure," he protested. "That man's as slippery as wet leather; he's fooled more than one that thought they had him, and I'll bet you two bits he's fooled you."

"Go and see and settle it yourself, then," Thorn proposed, in surly humor.

Chadron had suspended his breakfast, as if the news had come between him and his appetite. He sat in a study, his big hand curved around his cup, his gaze on the cloth. At that juncture Maggie came in with a platter of eggs and ham, which she put down before Mark Thorn skittishly, ready to jump at the slightest hostile start. Thorn began to eat, as calmly as if there was not a stain on his crippled soul.

Unlike the meal of canned oysters which he had consumed as Chadron's guest not many days before, Thorn was not welcomed to this by friendly words and urgings to take off the limit. Chadron sat watching him, in divided attention and with dark face, as if he turned troubles over in his mind.

Thorn cleaned the platter in front of him and looked around hungrily, like a cat that has half satisfied its stomach on a stolen bird. He said nothing, only he reached his foul hand across the table and took up the dish containing the remnant of Chadron's breakfast. This he soon cleared up, when he rasped the back of his hand across his harsh mustache, like a vulture preening its filthy plumage, and leaned back with a full-stomached sigh.

"He makes six," said he, looking hard at Chadron.

"Huh!" Chadron grunted, non-committally.

"I want the money down on the nail. A thousand for the job. I'm through."

"I'll have to look into it. I ain't payin' for anything sight 'nseen," Chadron told him, starting out of his speculative wanderings.

"Money down on the nail," repeated Thorn, as if he had not heard. His old cap was hovering over his long hair, its flaps down like the wings of a brooding hen. There were clinging bits of broken sage on it, and burrs, which it had gathered in his skulking through the brush.

"I'll send a man up the river right away and find out about this last one," Chadron told him, nodding slowly. "If you've got Macdonald—"

"If hell's got fire in it!"

"If you've got him, I'll put something to the figure agreed on between you and me. The other fellers you've knocked over don't count."

"I'll hang around—"

"Not here! You'll not hang around here, I tell you!" Chadron cut him off harshly, fairly bristling. "Snake along out of here, and don't let anybody see you. I'll meet you over at the hotel in the morning."

"Gittin' peticlar of your company, ain't you?" sneered Thorn.

"You're not company, you're business," Chadron told him, with stern and reproving eyes.

Chadron found Mark Thorn smoking into the chimney in the hotel-office next morning, apparently as if he had not moved from that spot since their first meeting on that particular business. The old man-killer did not turn his head as Chadron entered the room, with a show of caution and suspicion in his movements, and closed the door after him.

He crossed over to the fire and stood near Thorn, who was slouching low in his chair, his long legs stretched straight, his

heels crossed before the low, ashy fire that smoldered in the chimney. For a little while Chadron stood looking down on his hired scourge, a knitting of displeasure in his face, as if he waited for him to break the silence. Thorn continued his dark reverie undisturbed, it seemed, his pipe-stem between his fingers.

"Yes, it was his dam' hired hand!" said Chadron with profound disgust.

"That's what I heard you say," acknowledged Thorn, not moving his head.

"You knew it all the time; you was tryin' to work me for the money so you could light out!"

"I didn't even know he had a hired hand." Thorn drew down his legs and straightened his back, and came up with considerable spirit to the defense of his evil intent.

"Well, he ain't got none now, but *he's* alive and kickin'. You've bungled on this job worse than an old woman. I didn't fetch you in here to clean out hired hands and kids. We can shake a blanket and scare that kind out of the country."

"Well, put him at fifty, then, if he was only a hired hand," said Thorn, willing to oblige.

"When you go ahead and do what you agreed to, then we'll talk money; and not a red till then."

Thorn got up, unlimbering slowly, and laid the pipe on the mantel-shelf. He seemed unmoved, indifferent; apathetic as a toothless old lion. After a little silence he shook his head.

"I'm done, I tell you," he said querulously, as if raising the question crossed him. "Pay me for that many and call it square."

"Bring in Macdonald," Chadron firmly demanded.

"I ain't a goin' to touch him! If I keep on after that man, he'll git *me*—it's on the cards; I can see it in the dark."

"Yes, you've lost your nerve, you old wildcat!" There was a taunt in Chadron's voice—a sneer.

Thorn turned on him, a savage, smothered noise in his throat.

"You can say that because you owe me money, but you know it's a dam' lie! If you didn't owe me money, I'd make you swaller it with hot lead!"

"You're talkin' a little too free for a man of your trade, Mark." While Chadron's tone was tolerant, even friendly, there was an undercurrent of warning, even threat, in it.

"You're the feller that's lettin' his gab outrun his gumption. How many does that make for me—talkin' about nerve—how many? Do you know?"

"I don't care how many. It lacks one of bein' enough to suit me."

"Twenty-eight, and I've got 'em down in m' book, and I can prove it!"

"Make it twenty-nine, and then quit, if you want to."

"Maybe I will." Thorn leaned forward a little, a glitter in his smoky eyes.

Chadron fell back, his face growing pale. His hand was on his weapon, his eyes noting narrowly every move Thorn made.

"If you ever sling a gun on me, you old devil, it'll be—"

"I ain't a goin' to sling no gun on you as long as you owe me money. I ain't a goin' to cut the bottom out of m' own money-poke, Chad; you don't need to swivel up your hide; you ain't marked for twenty-nine."

"Well, don't throw out any more hints like that; I don't like that kind of a joke."

"No, I wouldn't touch a hair of your head," Thorn ran on, following a vein which seemed to amuse him, for he smiled, a horrible, face-drawing contortion of a smile, "for if you and me ever had a fallin' out over money, I might git so hard up I couldn't travel, and one of them sheriff fellers might slip up on me."

"What's all this fool gab got to do with business?" Chadron was impatient; he looked at his watch.

"Well, I'd be purty sure to make a speech from the gallers—I always intended to—and lay everything open that ever took place between me and you and the rest of them big fellers. There's a

newspaper feller I know that wants to make a book out of m' life, with m' pict're in the inside of the lid, to be sold when I'm dead. I could git money for tellin' that feller what I know."

"Go on and tell him, then." Chadron spoke with a dare in his words and derision. "That'll be easy money, and it won't call for any nerve. But you don't need to be plannin' any speech from the gallus—you'll never go that fur if you try to double-cross me!"

"I ain't aimin' to double-cross no man, but you can call it that if it suits you. You can call it whatever you purty dam' well care to—I'm done!"

Chadron made no reply to that. He was pulling on his great gloves, frowning savagely, as if he meant to close the matter with what he had said, and go.

"Do I git any money, or don't I?" Thorn asked sharply.

"When you bring in that wolf's tail."

"I ain't a goin' to touch that feller, I tell you, Chad. That man means bad luck to me—I can read it in the cards."

"Maybe you call that kind of skulkin' livin' up to your big name?" Chadron spoke in derision, playing on the vanity which he knew to be as much a part of that old murderer's life as the blood of his merciless heart.

"I've got glory enough," said Thorn, satisfaction in his voice; "what I want right now's money."

"Earn it before you collect it."

"Twenty-eight 'd fill a purty fair book, countin' in what I could tell about the men I've had dealin's with," Thorn reflected, as to himself, leaning against the mantel, frowning down at the floor with bent head.

"Talk till you're empty, you old fool, and who'll believe you? Huh! You couldn't git yourself hung if you was to try!" Chadron's dark face was blacker for the spreading flood of resentful blood; he pointed with his heavy quirt at Thorn, as if to impress him with a sense of the smallness of his wickedness, which men would not credit against the cattlemen's word, even if he should publish it abroad. "You'll never walk onto the scaffold, no matter how hard you try; there 'll be somebody around to head you off and give you a shorter cut than that, I'm here to tell you!"

"Huh!" said Thorn, still keeping his thoughtful pose.

Man-killing is a trade that reacts differently on those who follow it, according to their depth and nature. It makes black devils of some who were once civil smiling, wholesome men, whether the mischance of life-taking has fallen to them in their duty to society or in outlawed deeds. It plunges some into dark taciturnity and brooding coldness, as if they had eaten of some root which blunted them to all common relish of life.

There are others of whom the bloody trade makes gabbling fools, light-headed, wild-eyed wasters of words, full of the importance of their mind-wrecking deeds. Like the savage whose reputation mounts with each wet scalp, each fresh head, these kill out of depravity, glorying in the growing score. To this class Mark Thorn belonged.

There was but one side left to that depraved man's mind; this bloody, base life had smothered the rest under the growing heap of his horrible deeds. Thorn had killed twenty-eight human beings for hire, of whom he had tally, but there was one to be included of whom he had not taken count himself.

As he stood there against the chimney-shelf he was only the outside husk of a man. His soul had been judged already, and burned out of him by the unholy passion which he had indulged. He was as simple in his garrulous chatter of glory and distinction as a half-fool. His warped mind ran only on the spectacular end that he had planned for himself, and the speech from the gallows that was to be the black, damning seal at the end of his atrocious life's record.

Thorn looked up from his study; he shook his head decisively.

"I ain't a goin' to go back over there in your country and give you a chance at me. If you git me you'll have to git me here. I ain't a goin' to sling a gun down on nobody for the money that's in it any more, I tell you. I'm through, I'm out of the game, my craw's full. It's a bad sign when a man wastes a bullet on a hired hand, takin' him for the boss, and I ain't a goin' to run no more resks on that feller. When my day for glory comes I'll step out on the gallers and say m' piece, and they'll be some big fellers in this country huntin' the tall grass about that time, I guess."

Chadron had taken up his quirt from the little round table where the hotel register lay. He turned now toward the outer door, as if in earnest about going his way and leaving Mark Thorn to follow his own path.

"If you're square enough to settle up with me for this job," said Thorn, "and pay me five hundred for what I've done, I'll leave your name out when I come to make that little speech."

Chadron turned on him with a sneer. "You seem to have your hangin' all cut and dried, but you'll never go ten miles outside of this reservation if you don't turn around and put that job through. You'll never hang—you ain't cut out in the hangin' style."

"I tell you I will!" protested Thorn hotly. "I can see it in the cards."

"Well, you'd better shuffle 'em agin."

"I know what kind of a day it's goin' to be, and I know just adzackly how I'll look when I hold up m' hands for them fellers to keep still. Shucks! You can't tell me; I've seen that day a thousand times. It 'll be early in the mornin', and the sun bright—"

The door leading to the dining-room opened, and Thorn left his description of that great and final day in his career hanging like a broken bridge. He turned to see who it was, squinting his old eyes up sharply, and in watching the stranger he failed to see the whiteness that came over Chadron's face like a rushing cloud.

"Grab your gun!" Chadron whispered.

"Just let it stay where it is, Thorn," advised the stranger, his quick hand on his own weapon before Thorn could grasp what it was all about, believing, as he did, in the safety of the reservation's neutral ground. "Macdonald is my name, I've been looking for you." The stranger came on as he spoke.

He was but a few feet away from Thorn, and the old man-killer had his revolvers buckled around him in their accustomed place, while his death-spreading rifle stood near his hand, leaning its muzzle against the chimney-jamb. Thorn seemed to be measuring all the chances which he had left to him in that bold surprise, and to conclude in the same second that they were not worth taking.

Macdonald had not drawn his revolver. Only his hand was on the butt of it, and his eye held Thorn with a challenge that the old slayer was in no mind to accept.

Thorn was not a close-fighting man. He never had killed one of his kind in a face-to-face battle in all his bloody days. At the bottom he was a coward, as his skulking deeds attested, and in that moment he knew that he stood before his master. Slowly he lifted his long arms above his head, without a word, and stood in the posture of complete surrender.

Nearer the outer door stood Chadron, to whom Macdonald seemed giving little attention, as if not counting him in the game. The big cattle-man was "white to the gills" as his kind expressed that state. Macdonald unbuckled Thorn's belt and hung his revolvers over his arm.

"I knowed you'd git me, Macdonald," the old scoundrel said.

Macdonald, haggard and dusty, and grim as the last day that old Mark Thorn had pictured for himself, pushed his prisoner away from the chimney, out of reach of the rifle, and indicated that

he was to march for the open door, through which the tables in the dining-room could be seen. At MacDonald's coming Chadron had thrown his hand to his revolver, where he still held it, as if undecided how far to go.

"Keep your gun where it is, Chadron," Macdonald advised, "this isn't my day for you. Clear out of here—quick!"

Chadron backed toward the front door, his hand still dubiously on his revolver. Still suspicious, his face as white as it would have been in death, he reached back with his free hand to open the door.

"I told you he'd git me," nodded Thorn, with something near to exultation in the vindication of his reading of the cards. "I give you a chance—no man's money ain't a goin' to shut my mouth now!"

"I'll shut it, damn you!" Chadron's voice was dry-sounding and far up in his throat. He drew his revolver with a quick jerk that seemed nothing more than a slight movement of the shoulder. Quick as he was—and few in the cattlemen's baronies were speedier than Chadron there — Macdonald was ahead of him. The muzzle of Chadron's pistol was still in the leather when Macdonald's weapon was leveled at his eyes.

"Drop that gun!"

A moment Chadron's arm hung stiffly in that half-finished movement, while his eyes gave defiance. He had not bent before any man in many a year of growing power. But there was no other way; it was either bend or break, and break beyond repair.

Chadron's fingers were damp with sudden sweat as he unclasped them from the pistol-butt and let the weapon fall; sweat was on his forehead, and a heaviness on his chest as if a man sat on him. He felt backward through the open door with one foot, like an old man distrustful of his limbs, and steadied himself with his shoulder against the jamb, for there was a trembling in his knees. He knew that he had saved himself from the drop into eternal inconsequence by the shading of a second, for there was death in dusty Alan Macdonald's face. The escape left Chadron shaken, like a man who has held himself away from death by his finger-ends at the lip of a ledge.

"I knowed you'd git me, Macdonald," Thorn repeated. "You don't need no handcuffs nor nothin' for me, I'll go along with you as gentle as a fish."

Macdonald indicated that Thorn might lower his arms, having taken possession of the rifle. "Have you got a horse?" he asked.

Thorn said that he had one in the hotel stable. "But don't you try to take me too fur, Macdonald," he advised. "Chadron he'll ride a streak to git his men together and try to take me away from you—I could see it in his eye when he went out of that door."

Macdonald knew that Thorn had read Chadron's intentions right. He nodded, to let him know that he understood the cattleman's motives.

"Well, don't you run me off to no private rope party neither, Macdonald, for I can tell you things that many a man 'd pay me big money to keep my mouth shut on."

"You'll have a chance, Thorn."

"But I want it done in the right way, so's I'll git the credit and the fame."

Macdonald was surprised to find this man, whose infamous career had branded him as the arch-monster of modern times, so vain and garrulous. He could account for it by no other hypothesis than much killing had indurated the warped mind of the slayer until the taking of a human life was to him a commonplace. He was not capable of remorse, any more than he had been disposed to pity. He was not a man, only the blighted and cursed husk of a man, indeed. But doubly dangerous for his irresponsibility, for his atrophied small understanding.

Twenty miles lay between the prisoner and the doubtful security of the jail at Meander, and most of the distance was

through the grazing lands within Chadron's bounds. On the other hand, it was not more than twelve miles to his ranch on the river. He believed that he could reach it before Chadron could raise men to stop him and take the prisoner away.

Once home with Thorn he could raise a posse to guard him until the sheriff could be summoned. Even then there was no certainty that the prisoner ever would see the inside of the Meander jail, for the sheriff of that county was nothing more than one of Chadron's cowboys, elevated to office to serve the unrighteous desires of the men who had put him there.

But Macdonald was determined that there should be no private rope party for Thorn, neither at the hands of the prisoner's employers nor at those of the outraged settlers. Thorn must be brought to trial publicly, and the story of his employment, which he appeared ready enough to tell for the "glory" in it, must be told in a manner that would establish its value.

The cruelly-inhuman tale of his contracts and killings, his engagements and rewards, must be sown by the newspapers far and wide. Out of this dark phase of their oppression their deliverance must rise.

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## CHAPTER X.

### "HELL'S A GOIN' TO POP."

CHANCE DALTON, foreman of Alamito Ranch, was in charge of the expedition that rode late that afternoon against Macdonald's homestead to liberate Mark Thorn, and close his mouth in the cattlemen's effective way upon the bloody secrets which he might in vainglorious boast reveal. Chadron had promised rewards for the successful outcome of the venture, and Chance Dalton rode with his three picked men in a sportsman's heat.

He was going out on a hunt for game such as he had run down more than once before in his many years under Chadron's hand. It was better sport than running down wolves or mountain lions, for there was the superior intelligence of the game to be considered. No man knew what turn the ingenuity of desperation might give the human mind. The hunted might go out in one last splendid blaze of courage, or he might cringe and beg, with white face and rolling eyes. In the case of Macdonald, Dalton anticipated something unusual He had tasted that unaccountable homesteader's spirit in the past.

Dalton was a wiry tough man who rode with his elbows out, like an Indian. His face was scarred by old knife-wounds, making it hard for him to shave, in consequence of which he allowed his red beard to grow to inch-length, where he kept it in subjugation with shears. The gutters of his scars were seen through it, and the ends of them ran up, on both cheeks, to his eyes. A knife had gone across one of these, missing the bright little pupil in its bony cave, but slashing the eyebrow and leaving him leering on that side.

The men who came behind him were cowboys from the Texas Panhandle, lean and tough as the dried beef of their native plains. It was the most formidable force, not in numbers, but in proficiency, that ever had proceeded against Macdonald, and the most determined.

Chadron himself had bent to the small office of spy to learn Macdonald's intentions in reference to his prisoner. From a sheltered thicket in the foothills the cattleman had watched the homesteader through his field-glasses, making certain that he was returning Thorn to the scene of his latest crimes, instead of risking him on the long road to the Meander jail.

Chadron knew that Macdonald would defend the prisoner's life with his own, even against his neighbors. Macdonald would be as eager to have Thorn tell the story of his transactions with the

Drovers' Association as they would be to have it shut off. The realization of this threw Chadron into a state which he described to himself as the "fantods." Another, with a more extensive and less picturesque vocabulary, would have said that the president of the Drovers' Association was in a condition of panic.

So he had despatched his men on this silencing errand, and now, as the sun was dipping over the hills, all red with the presage of a frosty night, Chance Dalton and his men came riding in sight of Macdonald's little nest of buildings fronting the road by the river.

Macdonald had secured his prisoner with ropes, for there was no compartment in his little house, built of boards from the mountain sawmill, strong enough to confine a man, much less a slippery one ilke Mark Thorn. The slayer had lapsed into his native taciturnity shortly after beginning the trip from the reservation to Macdonald's homestead, and now he lay on the floor trussed up like a hog for market, looking blackly at Macdonald. Macdonald was considering the night ride to Meander with his prisoner that he had planned, with the intention of proceeding from there to Cheyenne and lodging him in jail. He believed there might be a better chance of holding him for trial there, and some slight hope of justice.

A hail from the gate startled Macdonald. It was the custom of the homesteaders in that country, carried with them from the hills of Missouri and Arkansas, to sit in their saddles at a neighbor's gate and call him to the door with a long "hello-o-oh!" It was the password of friendship in that raw land; a cowboy never had been known to stoop to its use. Cowboys rode up to a homesteader's door when they had any thing to say to him, and hammered on it with their guns.

Macdonald went to the door and opened it unhesitatingly. The horseman at the gate was a stranger to him. He wore a little derby hat, such as the cowpunchers despised, and the trappings of [illegible] proclaimed him as a newcomer to that country. He inquired loudly of the road to Fort Shakie, and Macdonald shouted back the necessary directions, moving a step away from his open door.

The stranger put his hands to his ear and leaned over.

"Which?" said he.

At the sound of that distinctly cowboy vernacular, Macdonald sprang back to regain the shelter of his walls, sensing too late the trap that the cowboy's unguarded word had betrayed. Chance Dalton at one corner of the rude bungalow, his next best man at the other, had been waiting for the decoy at the gate to draw Macdonald away from his door. Now, as the homesteader leaped back in sudden alarm, they closed in on him with their revolvers drawn.

There was the sound of a third man trying the back door at the same time, and the disguised cowboy at the gate slung his weapon out and sent a wild shot into the lintel above Macdonald's head. The two of them on the ground had him at a disadvantage which it would have been fatal to dispute, and Macdonald, valuing a future chance more than a present hopeless struggle, flung his hands out in a gesture of emptiness and surrender.

"Put 'em up—high," Dalton ordered.

Dalton watched him keenly as the three in that picture before the door stood keyed to such tension as the human intelligence seldom is called upon to withstand. Macdonald stood with one foot on the low threshold, the door swinging half open at his back. He was bareheaded, his rough fair hair in wisps on temples and forehead. Dalton's teeth were showing between his bearded lips, and his quick eyes were scowling, but he held his companion back with a command of his free hand.

Macdonald lifted his hands slowly, holding them a little above a level with his shoulders.

"Give up your prisoner, Macdonald, and we'll deal square with you," Dalton said.

"Go in and take him," offered Macdonald, stepping aside out of the door.

"Go ahead of us, and put 'em up higher!" Dalton made a little expressive flourish with his gun, evidently distrustful of the homesteader's quick hand even at his present disadvantage.

The man at the back door was using the ax from Macdonald's wood pile, as the sound of splintering timber told. Between three fires, Macdonald felt his chance stretching to the breaking point, for he had no faith at all in Chance Dalton's word. They had come to get him, and it looked like they had won.

When Macdonald entered the house he saw Thorn sitting in the middle of the floor, where he had rolled and struggled in his efforts to see what was taking place outside.

"You've played hell now, ain't you? lettin' 'em git the drop on you that way!" he said to Macdonald, angrily. "They'll swing—"

"Hand over that gun, Macdonald," Dalton demanded. They were standing near him, one on either hand, both leveling their guns at his head. Macdonald could see the one at the back door of his little two-roomed bungalow through the hole that he had chopped.

"I don't hand my gun to any man; if you want it, come and take it," Macdonald said, feeling that the end was rushing upon him, wondering what it would be. A bullet was better than a rope, which Chadron had publicly boasted he had laid up for him. There was a long chance if Dalton reached for that gun — a long and desperate chance.

The man at the back door was shouting something, his gun thrust through the hole. Dalton made a cross-reach with his left hand for Macdonald's revolver. On the other side the cowboy was watching his comrade's gun pointing through the kitchen door; Macdonald could see the whites of his eyes as he turned them.

"Don't shoot in here! We've got 'em," he called.

His shifted eye told Macdonald that he was trusting to Dalton, and Dalton at that moment was leaning forward with a strain, cautiously, his hand near Macdonald's holster.

Macdonald brought his lifted arms down, like a swimmer making a mighty stroke, with all the steam behind them that he could raise. His back-handed blow struck the cowboy in the face; Macdonald felt the flame of his shot as it spurted past his forehead. The outer arm fell short of the nimbler and more watchful Dalton, but the duck that he made to escape it broke the drop that he had held over Macdonald.

Macdonald's hand flashed up with his own gun. He drove a disabling shot through Dalton's wrist as the ranch foreman was coming up to fire, and kicked the gun that he dropped out of reach of his other hand. The cowboy who had caught Macdonald's desperate blow had staggered back against the foot of the bed and fallen. Now he had regained himself, and was crouching behind the bed, trying to cover himself, and from there as he shrank down he fired. The next flash he sprawled forward with hands outstretched across the blanket, as if he had fallen on his knees to pray.

Macdonald caught Dalton by the shirt collar as he went scrambling on his knees after the revolver. Dalton was splashing blood from his shattered wrist over the room, but he was senseless to pain and blind to danger. He sprang at Macdonald, cursing and striking.

"Keep off, Dalton! I don't want to kill you, man!" Macdonald warned.

Careless of his life Dalton fought, and as they struggled, Mark Thorn undoubled himself from his hunched position and snatched Dalton's revolver in his bound hands from the floor. His long legs free of his binding ropes, Thorn

sprang for the door. He reached it at the moment that the man in the disguise of a homesteader pushed it open.

Macdonald did not see what took place there, for it was over by the time he had struck Dalton into a limp quiet heap at his feet by a blow with his revolver across the eyes. But there had been a shot at the door, and Macdonald had heard the man from the back come running around the side of the house. There were more shots, but all done before Macdonald could leap to the door.

There, through the smoke of many quick shots that drifted into the open door, he saw the two cowboys fallen with out-flung arms. In the road a few rods distant Mark Thorn was mounting one of Chadron's horses. The old outlaw flung himself flat along the horse's neck, and presented little of his vital parts as a target. As he galloped away Macdonald fired, but apparently did not hit. In a moment Thorn rode down the river-bank and out of sight.

Macdonald stood a little while in the middle of the disordered room after re-entering the house, a feeling of great silence about him, and a numbness in his ears and over his senses. It was a sensation such as he had experienced once after standing for hours under the spell of Niagara. Something seemed to have been silenced in the world.

He was troubled over the outcome of that treacherous assault. He felt that the shadow of the resultant tragedy was already stretching away from there like the penumbra of an eclipse which must soon engulf those homesteads on the river, and exact a terrible, blasting toll.

Dalton was huddled there, his life wasting through the wound in his wrist, blood on his face from the blow that had laid him still. The dead man across the bed remained as he had fallen, his arms stretched out in empty supplication. There was a pathos in the fellow's pose that touched Macdonald with a pity which he knew to be undeserved. He had not meant to take his life away in that hasty shot, but since it had happened so, he knew that it had been his own deliverance.

Macdonald stripped the garment back and looked at Dalton's hurt. There would be another one to take toll for in the cattlemen's list unless the drain of blood could be checked at once. Dalton moved, opening his eyes.

It seemed unlikely that Dalton ever would sling a gun with that member again, if he should be so lucky, indeed, as to come through with his life. The bone was shattered, the hand hung limp, like a broken wing. Dalton sat up, yielding his arm to his enemy's ministrations, as silent and ungracious as a dog. In a little while Macdonald had done all that he could do, and with a hand under the hollow of Dalton's arm he lifted him to his feet.

"Can you ride?" he asked. Dalton did not reply. He looked at the figure on the bed, and stood turning his eyes around the room in the manner of one stunned, and completely confounded by the failure of a scheme counted infallible.

"You made a botch of this job, Dalton," Macdonald said. "The rest of your crowd's outside where Thorn dropped them—he snatched your gun from the floor and killed both of them."

Dalton went weakly to the door, where he stood a moment, steadying himself with a hand on the jamb. Macdonald eased him from there to the gate, and brought the horses which the gang had hidden among the willows.

"Tell Chadron to send a wagon up here after these dead men," Macdonald said, leading a horse to the gate.

He helped the still silent Dalton into the saddle, where he sat weakly. The man seemed to be debating something to say to this unaccountably fortunate nester, who came untouched through all their attempts upon his life. But whatever it was that he cogitated he kept to himself, only turning his eyes back toward the house, where his two men lay on the ground. The face of one was turned up-

ward. In the draining light of the spent day it looked as white as innocence.

As Dalton drew his eyes away from the fearful evidence of his plan's miscarriage, the sound of hard riding came from the direction of the settlement up the river. Macdonald listened a moment as the sound grew.

"That will be no friend of yours, Dalton. Get out of this!"

He cut Dalton's horse a sharp blow. The beast bounded away with a start that almost unseated its dizzy rider; the two free animals galloped after it. Chance Dalton was on his way to Chadron with his burden of disgrace and disastrous news. It seemed a question to Macdonald, as he watched him weaving in the saddle as the gloom closed around him and shut him from sight, whether he ever would reach the ranch-house to recount his story, whatever version of the tragedy he had planned.

Tom Lassiter drew up before Macdonald's gate while the dust of Dalton's going was still hanging there. The gaunt old homesteader with the cloud of sorrows in his eyes said that he had been on his way over to see what had become of Macdonald in his lone hunt for Mark Thorn. He had heard the shooting, and the sound had hurried him forward.

Macdonald told him what had happened, and took him in to see the wreckage left after that sudden storm. Tom shook his head as he stood in the yard looking down at the two dead men.

"Hell's a goin' to pop now!" he said.

"I think you've said the word, Tom," Macdonald admitted. "They'll come back on me hard for this."

"You'll never have to stand up to 'em alone another time, I'll give you a guarantee on that, Mac."

"I'm glad to hear it," Macdonald replied, but wearily, and with no warmth or faith in his words.

"And they let that old scorpeen loose to skulk and kill ag'in!"

"Yes, he got away."

"They sure did oncork a hornet's nest when they come here this time, though, they sure did!" Tom stood in the door, looking into the darkening room and at the figure sprawled across the bed. "He-ell's a goin' to pop now!" he said again, in slow words scarcely above his breath.

He turned his head searchingly, as if he expected to see the cloud of it already lowering out of the night.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE SENOR BOSS COMES RIDING.

NOLA CHADRON had been a guest overnight at the post. She had come the afternoon before, bright as a bubble, and Frances had met her with a welcome as warm as if there never had been a shadow between them.

Women can do such things so much better than men. Balzac said they could murder under the cover of a kiss. Perhaps somebody else said it ahead of him; certainly a great many of us have thought it after. There is not a dear out of the whole world of them but is capable of covering the fire of lies in her heart with the rose leaves of her smiles.

Nola had come into Frances's room to do her hair, and employ her busy tongue while she plied the brush. She was a pretty bit of a figure in her fancily worked Japanese kimono and red Turkish slippers—harem slippers, she called them, and thought it deliciously wicked to wear them—as she sat shaking back her bright hair like a giver of sunbeams.

Frances, already dressed in her soft light apparel of the morning, stood at the window watching the activity of the avenue below, answering encouragingly now and then, laughing at the right time, to keep the stream of her little guest's words running on. Frances seemed all softness and warmth, all youth and freshness, as fair as a camelia in a sunny casement, there at the window with the light around her. Above that inborn dignity which every line of her body expressed, there

was a domestic tranquility in her subdued beauty that moved even irresponsible Nola with an admiration that she could not put into words.

"Oh, you soldiers!" said Nola, shaking her brush at Frances's placid back, "you get up so early and you dress so fast that you're always ahead of everybody else."

Frances turned to her, a smile for her childish complaint.

"You'll get into our soldiering ways in time, Nola. We get up early and live in a hurry, I suppose, because a soldier's life is traditionally uncertain, and he wants to make the most of his time."

"And love and ride away," said Nola, feigning a sigh.

"Do they?" asked Frances, not interested, turning to the window again.

"Of course," said Nola, positively.

"'Like the guardsmen of Old England,
'Or the *beaux sabreurs* of France—'

That's an old border song, did you ever hear it?"

"No, I never did."

"It's about the Texas rangers, though, and not real soldiers like you folks. A cavalryman's wife wrote it; I've got it in a book."

"Maybe they do that way in Texas, Nola."

"How?"

"Love and ride away, as you said. I never heard of any of them doing it, except figuratively, in the regular army."

Nola suspended her brushing and looked at Frances curiously, a deeper color rising and spreading in her animated face.

"Oh, you little goose!" said she.

"Mostly they hang around and make trouble for people and fools of themselves," said Frances in half-thoughtful vein, her back to her visitor, who had stopped brushing now, and was winding, a comb in her mouth.

Nola held her quick hand at the half-finished coil of hair while she looked narrowly at the outline of Frances's form against the window. A little squint of perplexity was in her eyes, and furrows in her smooth forehead. Presently she finished the coil with dextrous turn, and held it with outspread hand while she reached to secure it with the comb.

"I can't make you out sometimes, Frances, you're so funny," she declared. "I'm afraid to talk to you half the time," —which was in no part true—"you're so nunnish and severe."

"Oh!" said Frances, fully discounting the declaration.

No wonder that Major King was hard to wean from her, thought Nola, with all that grace of body and charm of word. Superiority had been born in Frances Landcraft, not educated into her in expensive schools, the cattleman's daughter knew. It spoke for itself in the carriage of her head there against the light of that fair new day, with the sunshine on the dying cottonwood leaves beyond the window-pane; in the lifting of her neck, white as King David's tower of shields.

"Well, I *am* half afraid of you sometimes," Nola persisted. "I draw my hand back from touching you when you've got one of your soaring fits on you and walk along like you couldn't see common mortals and cow-men's daughters."

"Well, everybody isn't like you, Nola; there are some who treat me like a child."

Frances was thinking of her father and Major King, both of whom had continued to overlook and ignore her declaration of severance from her plighted word. The colonel had brushed it aside with rough hand and sharp word; the major had come penitent and in suppliance. But both of them were determined to marry her according to schedule, with no weight to her solemn denial.

"Mothers do that right along," Nola nodded.

"Here's somebody else up early—" Frances held the curtain aside as she spoke, and leaned a little to see—"here's your father, just turning in."

"The *señor* boss?" said Nola, hurrying to the window.

Saul Chadron was mounting the steps,

booted and dusty, his revolvers belted over his coat. "I wonder what's the matter? I hope it isn't mother — I'll run down and see."

The maid had let Chadron in by the time Nola opened the door of the room, and there she stood leaning and listening, her little head out in the hall, as if afraid to run to meet trouble. Chadron's big voice came up to them.

"It's all right," Nola nodded to Frances, who stood at her elbow, "he wants to see the colonel."

Frances had heard the cattleman's loud demand for instant audience. Now the maid was explaining.

"The colonel he's busy with military matters this early in the day, sir, and nobody ever disturbs him. He don't see nobody but the officers. If you'll step in and wait—"

"The officers can wait!" Chadron said, in big voice that must have made the servant shiver. "Where's he at?"

Frances could see in her lively imagination the frightened maid's gesture toward the colonel's office door. Now the girl's feet sounded along the hall in hasty retreat as Chadron laid his hearty knock against the colonel's panels.

Frances smiled behind her friend's back. The impatient disregard by civilians of the forms which her father held in such esteem always was a matter of humor to her. She expected now to hear explosions from within her father's sacred place, and when the sound failed to reach her she concluded that some subordinate hand had opened the door to Chadron's summons.

"I'll hurry—" Nola dashed into her own room, finishing from the door—"I want to catch him before he goes and find out what's wrong."

Frances went below to see about breakfast for her tardy guest, a little fluttering of excitement in her own breast. She wondered what could have brought the cattleman to the post so early—he must have left long before dawn—and in such haste to see her father, all buckled about with his arms. She trusted that it might not be that Alan Macdonald was involved in it, for it was her constant thought to hope well for that bold young man who had heaved the homesteaders' world to his shoulders and stood straining, untrusted and uncheered, under its weight.

True, he had not died in defense of her glove, but she had forgiven him in her heart for that. A reasonable man would not have imperiled his life for such a trifle, and a reasonable woman would not have expected it. There was a great deal more sense in Alan Macdonald living for his life's purpose than in dying for a foolish little glove. So she said.

The white gossamer fichu about her throat moved as with a breath in the agitation of her bosom as she passed down the stairs; her imperious chin was lowered, and her strong brown eyes were bent like a nun's before the altar. Worthy or unworthy, her lips moved in a prayer for Alan Macdonald, strong man in his obscure place; worthy or unworthy, she wished him well, and her heart yearned after him with a great tenderness, like a south wind roaming the night in gentle quest.

Major King, in attendance upon his chief, had opened the door to Saul Chadron at the colonel's frowning nod. Without waiting for the password into the mysteries of that chamber, Chadron had strode in, his heavy quirt in hand, gauntlets to his elbows, dusty boots to his knees. Colonel Landcraft stood at his desk to receive him, his brows bent in a disfavoring frown.

"I've busted in on you, colonel, because my business is business, not a mess of reportin' and signin' up on nothing, like your fool army doin's!" Chadron clamped with clicking spurs across the severe bare floor as he made this announcement, the frown of his displeasure in having been stopped at the door still dark on his face.

"I'm waiting your pleasure, sir," Colonel Landcraft returned stiffly.

"I want twenty-five troopers and a

cannon, and somebody that knows how to use it, and I want 'em right away!"

Chadron gave the order with a hotness about him, and an impatience not to be denied.

"Sir!" said Colonel Landcraft, throwing his bony shoulders back, his little blue eyes growing very cold and unfriendly.

"Them dam' rustlers of Macdonald's are up and standin' agin us, and I tell you I want troopers, and I want 'em on the spot!"

Colonel Landcraft swallowed like an eagle gorging a fish. His face grew red, he clamped his jaw and held his mouth shut. It took him some little time to suppress his flooding emotions, and his voice trembled even when he ventured to trust himself to speak.

"That's a matter for your civil authorities, sir; I have nothing to do with it at all."

"You ain't got nothing—?" Chadron's amazement seemed to overcome him. He stopped, his eyes big, his mouth open; he turned his head from side to side in dumfounded way, as if to find another to bear witness to this incredible thing.

"I tell you they're threatenin' my property, and the property of my neighbors!" protested Chadron, stunned, it seemed, that he should have to stop for details and explanations. "We've got millions invested—if them fellers gobbles up our land we're ruined!"

"Sir, I can sympathize with you in your unfortunate business, but if I had millions of my own at stake under similar conditions I would be powerless to employ, on my own initiative, the forces of the United States army to drive those brigands away."

Chadron looked at him hard, his hat on his head, where it had remained all the time, his eyes staring in unspeakable surprise.

"The hell you would!" said he.

"You and your neighbors surely can raise enough men to crush the scoundrels and hang their leader to a limb," the colonel suggested. "Call out your men, Chadron, and ride against him. I never took you for a man to squeal for help in a little affair like this."

"He's got as many as a hundred men organized, maybe twice that—" Chadron multiplied on the basis of damage that his men had suffered—"and my men tell me he's drillin' 'em like soldiers."

"I'm not surprised to hear that," nodded the colonel; "that man Macdonald's got it in him to do that, and fight like the devil, too."

"A gang of 'em killed three of my men a couple of days ago when I sent 'em up there to his shack to investigate a little matter, and Macdonald shot my foreman up so bad I guess he'll die. I tell you, man, it's a case for troopers!"

"What has the sheriff and the rest of you done to restore order?"

"I took twenty of my men up there yisterday, and a bunch of Sam Hatcher's from acrost the river was to join us and smoke that wolf out of his hole and hang his dam' hide on his cussed bob-wire fence. But hell! they was ditched in around that shack of hisn, I tell you, gentlemen, and they peppered us so hard we had to streak out of there. I left two of my men, and Hatcher's crew couldn't come over to help us, for them dam' rustlers had breastworks throwed up over there and drove 'em away from the river. They've got us shut out from the only ford in thirty miles."

"Well, I declare!" said the colonel, warming at this warlike news.

"Macdonald's had the gall to send me notice to keep out of that country up the river, and to run my cattle out of there, and it's my own land, by God! I've been grazin' it for eighteen years!"

"It looks like a serious situation," the colonel admitted.

"Serious!" There was scorn for the word and its weakness in Chadron's stress. "It's hell, I tell you, when a man can't set foot on his own land!"

"Are they all rustlers up there in the settlement; are there no honest homesteaders among them who would combine

with you against this wild man and his unlawful followers?" the colonel wanted to know.

"Not a man amongst 'em that ain't cut the brand out of a hide," Chadron declared. "They've been nestin' up there under that man Macdonald for the last two years, and he's the brains of the pack. He gits his rakeoff out of all they run off and sell. Me and the other cattlemen we've been feedin' and supportin' 'em till the drain's gittin' more'n we can stand. We've got to put 'em out, like a fire, or be eat up; we've got to hit 'em, and hit 'em hard."

"It would seem so," the colonel agreed.

"It's a state of war, I tell you, colonel; you're free to use your troops in a state of war, ain't you? Twenty-five troopers, with a little small cannon—" Chadron made illustration of the caliber that he considered adequate for the business with his hands—"to knock 'em out of their ditches so we could pick 'em off as they scatter, would be enough; we can handle the rest."

"If there is anything that I can do for you in my private capacity, I am at your command," offered Colonel Landcraft, with official emptiness, "but I regret that I am powerless to grant your request for troops. I couldn't lift a finger in a matter like this without a department order—you ought to understand that, Chadron."

"Oh, if that's all that's bitin' you, go ahead—I'll take care of the department," Chadron told him, with the relieved manner of one who had seen a light.

"Sir!"

If Chadron had proposed treason the colonel could not have compressed more censure into that word.

"That's all right," Chadron assured him, comfortably; "I've got two Senators and five Congressmen back there in Washington that jigger when I jerk the gee-string. You can cut loose and come into this thing with a free hand, and go the limit, the department be damned if they don't like it!"

Colonel Landcraft's face was flaming angrily. He snapped his dry old eyelids like flints over the steel of his eyes, and stood as straight as the human body could be drawn, one hand on his sword-hilt, the other pointing a trembling finger at Chadron's face.

"You cattlemen run this State, and one or two others here in the Northwest, I'm aware of that, Chadron. But there's one thing that you don't run, and that's the United States army! I don't care a damn how many Congressmen dance to your tune, you're not big enough to move even one trooper out of my barracks, sir! That's all I've got to say to you."

Chadron stood a little while, glowering at the colonel. It enraged him to be blocked in that manner by a small and inconsequential man. This he felt Colonel Landcraft to be, measured against his own strength and importance in that country. Himself and the other two big cattlemen in that section of the State lorded it over an area greater than two or three of the old States where the slipping heritage of individual liberty was born. Now here was a colonel in his way; one little old gray colonel!

"All right," Chadron said at length, charging his words with what he doubtless meant to be a significant foreboding, measuring Colonel Landcraft with contemptuous eye, "I can call out an army of my own. I came to you because we pay you fellers to do what I'm askin' of you, and because I thought it 'd save me time. That's all."

"You came to me because you have magnified your importance in this country until you believe you're the entire nation!" the colonel replied, very hot and red.

Chadron made no answer to that. He turned toward the military door, but Colonel Landcraft would not permit his unsanctified feet, great as they were and free to come and go as they liked in other places, to pass that way. He frowned at Major King, who had stood by in silence all the time, like a good soldier, his eyes

straight ahead. Major King touched Chadron's arm.

"This way, sir, if you please," he said.

Chadron started out, wrathfully and noisily. Half-way to the door he turned, his dark face sneering in contemptuous scorn.

"Yes, you're one hell of a colonel!" he said.

Major King was holding the door open; Chadron swung his big body around to face it, and passed out. Major King saluted his superior officer and followed the cattleman into the hall, closing the sacred door behind him on the wrathful little old soldier standing beside his desk. King extended his hand, sympathy in gesture and look.

"If I was in command of this post, sir, you'd never have to ask twice for troops," he said.

Chadron's sudden interest seemed to give him the movement of a little start. His grip on the young officer's hand tightened as he bent a searching look into his eyes.

"King, I believe you!" he said.

Nola came pattering down the stairs. Chadron stood with open arms, and swallowed her in them as she leaped from the bottom tread. Major King did not wait to see her emerge again, rosy and lip-tempting. There was unfinished business within the colonel's room.

A few minutes later Nola, excited to her finger-ends, was retailing the story of the rustlers' uprising to Frances.

"Mother's all worked up over it, she's afraid they'll burn us out and murder us, but of course we'd clean them up before they'd ever get *that* far down the river."

"It looks to me like a very serious situation for everybody concerned," Frances said. "If your father brings in the men that you say he's gone to Meander to telegraph for, there's going to be a lot of killing done on both sides."

"Father says he's going to clean them out for good this time—they've cost us thousands of dollars in the past three years. Oh, you can't understand what a low-down bunch of scrubs those rustlers are!"

"Maybe not," Frances said, giving it up with a little sigh.

"I've got to go back to mother this morning, right away, but that little fuss up the river doesn't need to keep you from going home with me as you promised, Frances."

"I shouldn't mind, but I don't believe father will want me to go out into your wild country. I really want to go — I want to look around in your garden for a glove that I lost there on the night of the ball."

"Oh, why didn't you tell me?" Nola's face seemed to clear of something, a shadow of perplexity, it seemed, that Frances had seen in it from time to time since her coming there. She looked frankly and reprovingly at Frances.

"I didn't miss it until I was leaving, and I didn't want to delay the rest of them to look for it. It really doesn't matter."

"It's a wonder mother didn't find it, she's always prowling around among the flowers," said Nola, her eyes fixed in abstracted stare, as if she was thinking deeply of something apart from what her words expressed.

What she was considering, indeed, was that her little scheme of alienation had failed. Major King, she told herself, had not returned the glove to Frances. For all his lightness in the matter, prehaps he cared deeply for Frances, and would be more difficult than she had thought to wean. It would have to be begun anew. That Frances was ignorant of her treachery, as she now fully believed, made it easier. So the little lady told herself, surveying the situation in her quick head, at the same time deceiving herself completely, as many a shrewder schemer has been self-entangled in the devious plottings of this life.

On the other hand there sat Frances across the table—they were breakfasting alone, Mrs. Landcraft being a strict militarist, and always serving the colonel's

coffee with her own hand—throwing up a framework of speculation on her own account. Perhaps if she should go to the ranch she might be in some manner instrumental in bringing this needless warfare to a pacific end. Intervention at the right time, in the proper quarter, might accomplish more than strife and bloodshed could bring out of that one-sided war.

No matter for the justice of the homesteaders' cause, and the sincerity of their leader, neither of which she doubted or questioned, the weight of numbers and resources would be on the side of the cattlemen. It could result only in the homesteaders being driven from their insecure holdings after the sacrifice of many lives. If she could see Macdonald, and appeal to him to put down this foolish, even though well-intended strife, something might result.

It was an inconsequential turmoil, it seemed to her, there in that sequestered land, for a man like Alan Macdonald to squander his life upon. If he stood against the forces which Chadron had gone to summon he would be slain, and the abundant promise of his life wasted like water on the sand.

"I'll go with you, Nola," she said, rising from the table in quick decision.

**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 GRUNDY FAMILY

## BY MAZIE V. CARUTHERS

WE hear so much about that dame
Yclept old Madame Grundy—
She who believed that folks should live
As though each day were Sunday!

Doubtless, her children all grew up
On pious "prunes and prisms,"
Their recreation probably
Was learning catechisms.

While as for Grundy, henpecked soul,
Though history does not tell,
I'm sure the rôle of husbandette
On his poor shoulders fell!

How drab existence must have been
In that most proper house,
With a martinet for mother,
A killjoy for one's spouse!

When folks so sanctimonious are,
'Twere better that they should
Eschew the marriage bonds and cling
To decorous spinsterhood!

# Just to Prove It

by Gerald Mygatt

THIS isn't a story at all; it's a joke. It's one of the funniest jokes of the year—speaking quite impartially. As to who it's on—well, there might conceivably be a wide divergence of opinion. You'll have to decide the point for yourself. We're neutral!—THE EDITOR.

ALL this was started by a woman. She was an exceedingly estimable woman—and still is, for all I know—but she had the bad judgment to give a dinner in honor (as she put it) of a certain gentleman who professed to earn his living by writing poetry.

She had the further bad judgment to invite me to the dinner.

Now, I don't like poets. I never have liked them. I've always felt that writing poetry—little lines, you know, full of dinky, foolish words that go jumpety-jump, always ending with the same silly rimes—I've always felt that writing this sort of stuff must be one of the very lowest forms of indoor sport. Beyond this I don't like the way most poets wear their hair and their eyebrows.

I confess, I must admit, to a lukewarm respect for the fellow who writes prose. It's not an easy job at all. You really have to have something to say (certainly! —all prose writers have), and there's nobody except yourself to tell you how to say it. You have the whole English language to go wrong in, and consequently it is something of an accomplishment to go even half way right.

But poetry!— If you don't make sense the reader thinks it's his own fault. You can use all the bad grammar you like and fall back on your poetic license as an alibi. You can use words that don't mean a blamed thing. And you can't go wrong.

Suppose you want to write a sonnet. You get out one of Shakespeare's sonnets, and there you are. It has so many lines, so many syllables to the line, and so many rimes in exactly so many places. You just take what you think you have to say and fit it in. If you end your first line with "moon," you stick the word

"June" down where it ought to go, put some adjectives and verbs and adverbs in front of it—and it's poetry. Nothing simpler.

It's the same with all the other forms of verse. They're all ready for you. Just step aboard, touch the button of your self-starter, keep your eye on the road, and you're there.

Well, as I was saying, all this was begun by the giving of a dinner in honor of a man whose name hasn't anything to do with this story. Between the courses he stood up and read us selections from his latest compilations of words. Everybody kept clapping and asking for more. Naturally he gave more. When he ran out of new stuff he commenced repeating. It was great.

I determined that evening that if the government ever established the office of Commissioner of Poetic Licenses I'd run for the job, and start out by canceling all the licenses there were.

Finally the orgy wore itself out, and eventually the poet smirked and bowed and went home. And then, of course, everybody began fluttering and sighing and raving about him just as if he'd really done something to deserve it. I closed my eyes and tried not to look bored.

"Don't you think he's perfectly wonderful?" I heard somebody burble in my ear. I opened my eyes and saw that it was my hostess. "Don't you think he's perfectly wonderful?" she repeated.

I sat up straight in my chair.

"No," I said severely, "I don't."

Everybody gasped.

"I mean it," I insisted. "I don't think he's wonderful at all. I think he's trivial—piffling—asinine—small potatoes."

"What do you mean?" demanded the chorus.

"Anybody can write poetry," I snapped. "Anybody—anybody. It's the easiest thing in the world."

Again every one gasped.

"Why, I think you're perfectly awful," said a woman in the corner, in the tone of one who draws her skirts away.

With a good deal of dignity, if I do say so myself, I briefly stated my beliefs about the writing of verse. I told them that it was purely mechanical, requiring nothing more than an ordinary grammar-school education. I told them that all you had to do was to open the dictionary at random, take the first word you saw, season with verbs and prepositions to fit the meter, and let her go. As long as you got a lot of words that nobody could understand and that sounded as if they meant something, you were all right.

"But if anybody can write poetry," my hostess persisted, "then why *doesn't* everybody write poetry?"

"Anybody can fall off the roof of a building. Why doesn't everybody fall off the roof of a building?" I smiled triumphantly.

"Don't be absurd," said my hostess severely. "Maybe anybody can write the sort of poetry you mean—just a common jingle of words and obvious rimes—but it takes brains, talent, genius to write what I call poetry. It takes brains to write a piece of verse that will be printed, for instance, in one of our better magazines."

I shook my head vigorously.

"Do you mean to say," she went on, "that anybody can write a piece of verse that will be accepted and published by a magazine—a magazine like, say, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY?"

"Certainly!" I said. "Nothing easier."

One of the men in the room threw back his head and laughed.

"Suppose *you* try," he suggested, an evil gleam in his eye.

"Certainly, nothing easier," I repeated.

"Ho! ho!" he roared. "Are you serious? Why—I will bet you anything that you can't come within a mile of it."

"Twenty-five dollars?" I queried.

"Anything."

"I'll take you," I said, "for twenty-five dollars."

The room was suddenly quiet. Everybody looked at everybody else and then at me.

"Have you any stipulations as to how it's to be done?"

"None. If you can write a piece of verse on your predigested principle and land it in print in the ALL-STORY—you win!"

"All right," I agreed. "Let's start now. If you like, I'll write it on the spot. I'll even let you people select the form I'm to write it in. We've got to decide on that, you know."

The girl sitting next to the man who had laughed now began to giggle.

"How about using a nursery rime for your pattern?" she suggested. "It would be fittting, it seems to me."

I glared at her politely.

"The one," she went on, "the one, you know, about the man of our town who was so wondrous wise?" Again she giggled.

"That's a very good one," I said. "We'll use it. Shall I start now?" They all nodded eagerly. "Well, then, I need a dictionary and some paper and pencils."

We waited in silence while they were brought. I laid the paper on a little table before me and handed the dictionary to the girl who had giggled.

"The meter," I explained, "obviously goes 'ta-tum-te-tum-te-tum-te-tum, ta-tum-te-tum-te-tum,' and so on. Is that right? Very well, open the dictionary anywhere and give me the first word on the left-hand page."

She opened it. Several people snickered.

"'Pole,'" she announced.

"No," I said, "it has to be a 'ta-tum' word, with the emphasis on the 'tum.'"

She nodded and ran her finger down the column.

"I don't like 'police,'" she observed. "Oh, here you are! 'Polite.'" I put it down.

"Find another that fits the meter," I directed.

"H-m! Oh, yes! 'Polygamous.'" I put it down.

"Let's stay in the p's for alliteration's sake," I suggested. "Then we'll jump." She found "poltroon," and I put it down.

"*Polite, polygamous poltroon,*" I read. "That's a bully start. You can just picture him. Fine! Now I'll use the next three syllables for verbs and things while you look up another three-syllable word for the end of the line."

"Here you are," said the girl. "How about 'retrograde'?"

I put it down and filled in the line.

"*Polite polygamous poltroon, 'twas but his retrograde,*" I recited. "That's the first line. Doesn't it sound all right?" I asked, turning to the company.

"Rotten," commented the man who had bet with me. "Go ahead."

"Next!" I directed. "Any word!"

"'Barbel,'" said the girl. "It means—"

"Never mind what it means, I'll use it. *Barbel he was, yet*—a three-syllable word now, that ends with 'oon.'"

That took some time. Finally:

"'Barracoon,'" she announced, her finger in the dictionary. I nodded.

"*Barbel he was, yet barracoon, this*—"

"'Limner,'" she said.

"*Of,*" said I. "Two syllables needed, ending in 'ade.' Let's make a proper name and save time. That's legitimate. Something that sounds foreign."

"How about something like 'Schlazade'?" asked the hostess.

I nodded vigorously and put it down. "That's two lines," I said.

"Asinine," was somebody's comment.

"Not asinine at all," I retorted, "and I have twenty-five dollars that takes it just as seriously as I do. Are you game to go on?" I asked of the girl with the dictionary.

"Of course," was her answer.

She found "scumbled" and "scuppernong" and "scutiform" under "S." Then she jumped toward the front of the book and produced "corymb." I asked for a one-syllable noun and she gave me "pride," a one-syllable verb and she gave me "seep." To rime with "scuppernong" we used "along."

That gave us the first stanza. For the second we seemed to warm up a bit, and consequently we granted our imaginations freer rein, but we took our important words in the same arbitrary and, as you must agree with me, eminently satisfactory way. It was well within the hour when the last word was put in its place. "Chrysoberyloid" it was, a word to conjure with!

"Done," I announced.

Everybody sat back expectantly. I laid down my pencil, cleared my throat in a dignified and not unimpressive manner, and stood up.

"Just a minute," broke in the man who had offered to bet with me. "What are you going to call it?"

"It doesn't matter," I proclaimed; "I'll call it anything you like. The title doesn't have to have anything to do with the verse itself. They never do, you know—as long as it's something striking or original."

"I was going to suggest 'The Idiot at Large,'" he said, "but I can't do you justice. I give up."

I motioned to the girl with the dictionary.

"Open it anywhere. Give me the first long word you find—the first long one that you've never seen before. Something that sounds classical."

She bent her head over the book, and turned several pages.

"How would 'lepidoptera' do?" she finally asked. "It means a kind of bug, as far as I can see."

"Fine," said the man who had bet, and laughed.

"Read it," chorused the gathering. "Let's see what you've got."

I cleared my throat again and read:

"LEPIDOPTERA

"Polite, polygamous poltroon, 'twas but his retrograde;
Barbel he was, yet barracoon, this limner of Schlazade.
He spoke a scumbled scuppernong, a scutiform corymb—
Too late, his pride to seep along, too late, indeed, for him.

"To outward view conterminous, to inward view adept,
His obfuscation verminous myopic as he wept—
Too late, a gudgeon though it were, in sesquiserried void
Might elevate his soul to her, his chrysoberyloid!"

I stopped and looked. A woman I didn't know started to clap, then checked herself in embarrassment as every one glared at her. Another woman snickered. For a moment nobody said anything, then the man who had done the betting broke out with one of his guffaws.

"It sounds like 'Alice in Wonderland,'" shouted my hostess through the noise of the man's laughter.

"Oh, no!" I corrected her with dignity. "Those in 'Alice' were made-up words; these are real words, all in the English language."

The man who had made the bet abruptly turned to me. He still seemed to think something was funny.

"That's the most asinine junk I ever heard," he roared. "It's rot, perfect rot. Are you making sport of us here, or what? Do you really mean to tell me you still think you can get that printed in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY?"

"I do," I said, bowing low before him.

Well—didn't I? I leave it to anybody.

# The Scarlet Ghost

by Perley Poore Sheehan

Author of "We Are French!" "The Million Passing Tales," "Abu, the Dawn-Maker," etc.

*(Sequel to "Those Who Walk in Darkness.")*

## SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

MRS. ALICE UNDERWOOD, wife of Rufus Underwood, a farmer of Rising Sun, was formerly "Viola Swan," of the New York Tenderloin, and though she is determined to reform, the personality of Viola Swan is still externally rampant. Jessie Schofield, a girl of seventeen, with a fascinated conception of the White Light life in New York, thinks she would "just love" to be a "siren," and, after Alec Breen, on a visit from New York, has attempted to inveigle Mrs. Underwood into her old life, Jessie asks Alec to take her to New York with him. Jessie leaves Rising Sun secretly, intending to join Alec—who was originally a product of Rising Sun—in New York. Mrs. Underwood is accused by Mrs. Jenvey, Jessie's aunt, of corrupting the girl's morals, and Mrs. Underwood, defended by Uncle Joel Kennedy—who has also saved her from the insults of Alec Breen—leaves Rising Sun by flagging the express. She is going to New York to bring Jessie back.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE BEAUTY MART.

THERE had been a heavy rain the night before. The streets were muddy in places—where new buildings were going skyward, where excavations were in progress. But the atmosphere was almost supernaturally clear. Autumn was in the air.

There was a breeze out of the west with a touch of frost in it. This only served, though, to accentuate the brilliance of the sunshine—as it fluttered the flags and the banners, far, far up on the tops of the sky-scrapers, as it dissolved the clouds of steam into the immaculate and shimmering blue.

It was still early morning.

The day-shift of New York's vast and complex activity was coming on duty, the night-shift going off.

Forty-Second Street and Broadway was once more a congestion of life—as much of a congestion as it had been twelve hours earlier when the night began, when the movement was reversed and it was the day-shift going off duty, the night-shift coming on.

But now, as then, there was the same feverish push and purpose manifest in those who came and went — boys and girls, men and women, but no children. This was no place for children. It was no place for any one not equipped with speed or high durability; with strength, or with cunning to make the lack of strength inconspicuous or unimportant.

**his story began in the All-Story Weekly for January 6.**

Yet it was neither speed nor durability, strength nor cunning, which made these human tides ebb and flow.

It was Beauty.

That was the end of all ambitions hereabouts.

A little while ago it had been Beauty as represented in the latest play, or revue, or restaurant. Now it was the latest dress, the latest hat, the latest scheme to get money, with which Beauty must be served.

For, if an artist ever seeks to symbolize this part of New York, he should represent the tall buildings and the human swarms of it as dominated, driven, and inspired by a beautiful girl, not much more than eighteen, as the years of her present incarnation run, yet with a soul which began its education as far back, at least, as ancient Babylon.

There were many exemplars of the dominant Beauty in the crowds circulating through and around the neighborhood of Forty-Second Street and Broadway. Some belonged to the day-shift, some to the night-shift. Hardly a town in the United States—of the world—which hadn't picked out its prettiest, most ambitious, and sophisticated girl-child and whispered to her:

"Go to Broadway and Forty-Second Street, New York. You're wanted in the Beauty-Mart."

Even the dealers in second-hand clothes down on Seventh Avenue, who were anything but beautiful, were none the less engaged in the traffic. So were the hawkers of newspapers and mechanical toys, the chauffeurs and waiters, the gamblers and publicity-agents, the riff-raff and stars of the moving-picture world, the hangers-on and engineers of all the theatrical enterprises thereabouts.

There, like stalls in any other market, widespread and long established — and where much of the merchandise similarly had lost its initial bloom in the process of time and rough treatment — lay the contiguous zone of hotels and boarding-houses, of clubs and furnished flats.

One such stall in the Beauty-Mart was Mrs. Moss's place.

The house was in the Thirties. Once, it had been quite close to the center of things. That was when Mrs. Moss was twenty years younger than she now was, when she was still making her losing fight to retain some vestige of the beauty to which she herself could lay claim yet another twenty years still farther back.

For hadn't Mrs. Moss herself once been the prettiest and most sophisticated girl in her own native town? She most certainly had. And likewise had she listened to the same old whisper, had come riding into New York all ruffles and ribbons, with congress-gaiters on her pretty little feet, a fetching poke-bonnet framing her saucy face — bustle, hoops, carpet-bag.

The Cremorne was in the full flush of its magnificence then—Greek gods and looking-glasses, artificial palms, private wine-rooms upholstered in plush.

That was where pretty Lettie Moss had made her début.

Twenty years later found her managing her house in the Thirties, not far from the place where the Cremorne had flourished.

Still the Tenderloin! Still the very center of the Beauty-Mart! Still the scandal, the envy, and the pride of lesser towns! Still the hopper into which went so much of the country's young good looks, impatience, greed, innocence, and sophistication!

Now Mrs. Moss was old. Her house was old. Even the neighborhood had come to be known as the old Tenderloin.

But wise!

What hadn't the now bleared and fishy eyes of Mrs. Moss seen in all those years? What earthly knowledge hadn't been absorbed into that once shallow and pretty head? What treasons and tragedies hadn't corrupted her ancient and unlovely breast?

Police-captains who had been as czars in their day had come and gone and been forgotten. So had the politicians whose

nod could influence the courts. Gone also were the ten thousand "reigning beauties," "queens," and "female crooks."

Mrs. Moss had known them all.

Yet even she was still capable of a fresh human interest. She showed it on this immaculate morning of the early fall, when, even into that sordid street which was her habitat, there came something of the west wind's purity, something of that eager surge of humanity through and about Times Square.

Some instinct which had nothing to do with her dimming faculties brought her to the glass panel of her door, thence to look out into the murky shadows of her hall. She remained there, staring and motionless—save for some slight fanning movement about her—exactly like that of some watchful and rapacious old fish.

The hall was empty, but there was a distinct shadow on the door leading from the street. This door also had a glass panel; but it was ground glass, with a border of red-stained glass around it.

Mrs. Moss could never see this work of art without recalling the hint of luxury and grandeur it made upon her the first time she ever saw it. A cogent little memory of this swam through her brain now, in spite of the disquieting inquiry there as to who this might be thus loitering on her door-sill.

Mrs. Moss opened the door of her chamber and advanced through the dark and airless hall. She was noiseless. She clung rather close to one of the walls. There was something infinitely suggestive about her of that same wily old fish, furtive yet potentially savage, swimming out of its favorite pool to investigate some unfamiliar object.

Mrs. Moss was close to the front door before she stopped.

Her progress had not been without a growing perception. The ground glass was sufficiently translucent to have given her some idea of the person out there—a girl, for she had seen the shadow of her braid of hair hanging down her back; a poor girl, to judge by the reflected shadow of the out-of-style hat she wore.

But, as Mrs. Moss came to a stop, with the knob of the front door within reach of her hand, her perception suddenly gave a leap in advance. She had heard something—something that made her smile.

The girl out there was knocking.

There was an electric bell in full view at the outer sill. In the lobby there were a dozen other bells—one over each letter-box, a bell and letter-box for each flat.

Still the girl was knocking, as if she had never seen such an arrangement before. For a second or two Mrs. Moss entertained the theory that the electric system was out of order. She abandoned this. Her own bell had been properly rung only a short time ago by a young man who had sought to sell her a new washing-compound. Besides, that out-of-style hat the invisible girl wore told much to Mrs. Moss's sagacious old brain.

She herself had worn an out-of-style head-piece when she came to New York upward of forty years ago.

Gently she opened the door.

There was a girl standing there, sure enough. On her head was a straw hat somewhat of a type which had been fashionable on upper Lexington Avenue the summer before last. It was too late for straw hats now, even if the hat had been of the present season. And, surely enough, the girl wore her hair down her back—a straight and heavy braid of uncertain yellow.

Mrs. Moss, with her head bent and a little to one side, assumed an expression meant to be one of smiling encouragement.

She had noted, moreover, the girl's clean but clumsy and unpretentious gingham dress, her thick cotton stockings, her substantial shoes. Also had she noted the bold innocence of the girl's rather pretty, rather heavy features, the tan and bloom of her skin.

But Mrs. Moss's smile would have sent a chill to the hearts of some people; not so, evidently, to the heart of the young

creature who had knocked at Mrs. Moss's door.

"How do you do?" said the visitor. "Is this where Mr. Breen lives?—Mr. Alexander Breen?"

Mrs. Moss, before answering, gathered up her apron and began to polish the outer door-knob. She brought to this task a great degree of concentrated interest—somewhat like an old trout worrying a shiny lure.

"How come you to ask?" Mrs. Moss wanted to know, at last.

"He told me that this was where he lived," she said. "You see, he's a friend of mine—just about one of the oldest friends I've got, and I think the world and all of him. He's been up in the—the *city*—where I have my home, and we've done quite a lot of motoring together. He's making a lot of money, I guess. He's certainly a whole lot smarter than most of the boys in the—*city*—"

"What city is that?" asked Mrs. Moss, with stealthy interest.

"Rising Sun," the girl answered, with the suspicion of a blush. But she added: "It's not very large, although it's really quite well known."

Mrs. Moss blinked at her, pale-eyed, her mouth slightly open.

"You didn't come to New York all the way from Rising Sun by yourself, did you?"

"Oh, that's nothing!"

"And you ain't got no folks here in New York?"

"No one but Mr. Breen—and he's only a friend, of course. He does live here; does he not?"

"I'll have to see," said Mrs. Moss. "Come in! Come in!"

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### CONCERNING NEW YORK.

"WHAT did you say your name was?" asked Mrs. Moss.

She had guided the girl into her secret pool at the depth of the hall. The girl was seated there, quite comfortably and complacently, in Mrs. Moss's rocking-chair.

"Jessie Schofield," she replied; "or *Jessica*, I meant to say."

Then Jessie's cheek once more displayed a fleeting added tinge of color.

"But I don't imagine I'll be keeping that name very long," Jessie supplemented. "I'll be picking out something more suitable, I suppose, as so many—women do when they come to New York."

Mrs. Moss, who had been pottering about, giving her mind time enough to work, turned and looked at Jessie with a note of alarm.

"Change their names?" she asked, incredible.

"They all do," Jessie affirmed, beginning to rock.

"What do they do that for?" Mrs. Moss wanted to know. Mrs. Moss was frankly scandalized.

Jessie rather enjoyed the old lady's concern. In her own mind, she was otherwise tranquil. She was certain, by this time, that she had made no mistake in the address. The old lady, as yet, had neither confirmed nor denied the fact that Alec lived here. Still, she was friendly, like every one else Jessie had thus far encountered since her flight from Rising Sun, and Jessie was willing to talk to her.

"Some of them change their names for one reason, some for another," the girl replied. "Romance, I suppose, is back of most of the name-changing that goes on here."

"Romance, did you say?"

Mrs. Moss was so interested that she herself sat down on a chair in front of Jessie.

"Romance!" Jessie responded. "How long have you lived here?"

"Quite a spell."

"Well, I guess I don't have to tell you about it," said Jessie. "I guess you must have heard enough yourself."

"You're ahead of me," Mrs. Moss vouchsafed.

"Do you mean to tell me that you

never heard that New York was just a riot of romance and veiled sin and everything like that?"

"Never heard of it!" bubbled Mrs. Moss, with static conviction.

"Why," Jessie pursued, "I bet you that right now, less than a mile from this very house, gentlemen are tipping their hats to ladies that they never saw in their lives before."

"They never tried it on me," said Mrs. Moss, with a return of alarm. But she was obviously eager to hear more.

"Yes, and the ladies are speaking back to them, too!"

"Not nice ladies!"

"That depends on what you call 'nice,'" said Jessie.

She began to dip into her rich stock of knowledge garnered from that book entitled "Metropolitan Life Unveiled, or Mysteries and Miseries of America's Great Cities." There was scarcely a striking passage in the entire volume that she couldn't have repeated by heart, or, at least, have paraphrased.

"That depends on what you call 'nice,'" she said, with a touch of condescension. "It is no uncommon sight to see a female, covered with the trophies of wealth and bearing the semblance of aristocracy in her rich apparel, drunk on the streets. Yet such exhibitions of depravity are rare compared with the dissipation in which some of the city's best society people indulge."

"Ain't that the limit!" Mrs. Moss panted.

"It's perfectly true," Jessie went on. "Of course *you* never heard about such things, but there are female club-houses, in the better sections, where society belles may indulge their thirst for spirits amid scenes of sumptuous splendor."

"Now, what do you know about that?" Mrs. Moss exclaimed. "I've heard tell that the city was full of fast ones, but I always thought they come from out of town."

"I guess they do," Jessie acceded, willing to include herself in the intimated compliment. "Thousands of women visit New York out of curiosity or through love of adventure; but it isn't long before the majority of them are swept into the maelstrom of vice—as they call it. You know! She may be full of resolution, and 'coronated with the jewels of chastity,' but it isn't long before her decisions are undermined by the gilded libertine, the gaudy matron."

"I bet they never ketch you," Mrs. Moss bubbled.

"One of them tried it already," affirmed Jessica, not without satisfaction.

"No!"

"Yes! Right over in the Grand Central! She was a swell looker, too. I guess she thought it was enough that I came in on the train that brings the milk. Mr. Breen wasn't really expecting me until tomorrow. I was in such a rush that I got the dates mixed up. But, anyway, when this lady saw me looking around she came right up to me as if she knew me and said she belonged to some society or other that looked out for young girls arriving alone in the city. You can bet that I gave her the go-by, although I was really crazy to follow her and see where the adventure led to."

"Ain't that the limit!" Mrs. Moss mused.

"I just told her that I was going to my aunt's," laughed Jessie. "Then she asked me where my aunt lived. The 'Travelers' Aid Society!' That's it. That's what she said she belonged to."

"And you give her this address?" gulped Mrs. Moss, craftily.

"I said that my aunt lived in Brooklyn," Jessie answered. "Is that very far from here? So she asked me if I didn't want to leave my grip in the check-room. Well, I left it there, just to get rid of her. I was simply wild to get out and see New York."

"No one can accuse you of being green," Mrs. Moss adjudged. "And you come straight here?"

"Almost! And you can imagine how thrilled I was to find that the place was

in such a perfectly elegant part of town. I've read so much about Broadway, and the Haymarket, and the Buckingham Palace, and everything. Why, it must be right near here!—the famous Cremorne Garden?"

"What's that?" asked Mrs. Moss, with stifled breath.

"Have you never heard of the Cremorne Garden?"

"The name sounds familiar."

"The most high-toned concert and beer-garden in the metropolis," Jessie recited, rocking herself. "There are seventy-five tables in the place, and at each table sits a girl, charmingly dressed, who invites the customers to sit down."

"Without being introduced?"

Jessica frankly enjoyed Mrs. Moss's innocence. She decided to shock the old lady yet a little more.

"I thought that if I didn't get anything else to do I might take a position like that myself," she said. "I simply dote on romance, and you may imagine what an opportunity for romance such girls have—with all the millionaires and young clubmen coming in there, and famous clergymen in disguise, and senators! Just think of fascinating some one who's an absolute stranger to you, and then having him reveal himself as the scion of some old and famous family!"

"Mebbe he'd be lying to you," bubbled Mrs. Moss. "I suppose"—with a desire for enlightenment—"that there are some liars—even at the—what was it—the Haygarden?"

But Jessie, with the best will in the world, and likewise the greatest desire in the world to remain awake and discuss this marvelous new world into which she had injected herself, was reaching the limit of her wakefulness. She had traveled all night in the jolting train. The excitement of her great adventure had sent her to soaring as far above the shades of sleep as an eagle soars above the limit of the clouds.

"The Cremorne Gardens," she corrected, with a sleepy smile.

That name, which had had such a tremendous place in her own life, came like a surprising echo out of the past to Mrs. Moss. It was a name which in twenty years she had barely heard.

Where was the Cremorne now?

Where were the familiar crowds who once thronged that particular stall in the market of beauty and youthfulness?

Where had her own youth gone?

"There it is," a voice seemed to whisper in Mrs. Moss's fluttery old heart. "There's your youth seated before you now, in the person of that girl, her foolish head filled with the illusions which were yours when you were her age; her heart, like yours, hankering for the grinning skull she still labels romance."

"Mr. Breen works all night, deary," said Mrs. Moss. "He's asleep now, and that's where you ought to be. I'm going to give you a nice little room where you can sleep as peaceful as a baby. In the mean time, give me your check-room number and I'll send over for your things, so's you'll have them when you want to get up."

Jessie's head was nodding. It was only by an effort sustained that she remained awake as she followed Mrs. Moss once more through the murky and airless shadows of the hall. Up near the front of it Mrs. Moss unlocked a door and threw it open.

As she did so there came to Jessie's somnolent senses a faint gust of perfume such as might have come to her out of a dream.

"This flat's vacant," Mrs. Moss murmured, kindly enough, yet with an accent of bitterness. "I ain't had much luck with it here of late. I used to have a girl in it—mebbe you know her," she broke off, with a whiff of caution. "She got married, moved up in the country somewheres."

"What was her name?" asked Jessie.

But Jessie suddenly knew what answer Mrs. Moss was going to make—knew it in spite of her sleepiness; because of her sleepiness, perhaps. It was one of those

little glints of knowledge which come out of that part of the brain which wakes when the other part sleeps.

She recognized it now, that tenuous breath of scented air—recognized it as she might have recognized a familiar voice.

Mrs. Moss turned and looked at her.

"Her name," she said, "was Viola Swan."

"I—I guess I don't know her," Jessie said.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### INSTINCTS MATERNAL.

NOT in many a year had any visitor to the house of Mrs. Moss inspired in that old beauty-broker a deeper interest.

The thought that here was a counterpart of herself, as she had been at the time of her advent in New York, kept returning to her, nibbling at some unused portion of her memory, tickling her fancy, awakening imaginations and cravings which had long been dormant. The thought was a sort of magnetic force to bind her to Jessie's presence.

There was, moreover, a manifest sympathy and understanding between Mrs. Moss and the girl apart from this. Jessie herself showed it. Jessie liked Mrs. Moss, and Mrs. Moss vaguely responded to the odd appeal of this.

Mrs. Moss found it hard to leave the girl alone.

All the time that Jessie was undressing herself, babbling with a final flare of enthusiasm before sleep should slip the extinguisher on, Mrs. Moss pottered about the quarters which had once been Viola Swan's, listening only partly to what the girl said, listening principally to the still uncertain whispers of her heart.

Jessie shed her clothes a good deal as a boy might have done on the bank of a swimming-hole.

Mrs. Moss picked these vestments up.

Mrs. Moss was feeling within herself the stir of maternal instincts. That was the truth of the matter.

The gingham dress, the cotton stockings, the homely solidity of Jessie's undergarments were a caress to Mrs. Moss's old fingers such as the finest of silks and linens couldn't have given. It was a caress which swept aside the highly colored, highly seasoned years, filled her with disappointment, yet infused her with hope. The disappointment was a knowledge of her own failure to scale the heights of success. The hope was that she might play the leading part in helping Jessie to do so.

Youth!

Mrs. Moss looked at the girl's tumbled hair; the soft, smooth fulness of her throat and shoulders. She looked deeper than this—saw the budding character.

With youth and a character like that—informed and directed by an experience like Mrs. Moss's own—this child might go far.

"I'll tuck you in," Mrs. Moss volunteered.

Jessie, vividly conscious of the contact of this bed which had been Viola Swan's, and finding the contact delicious, surrendered herself to the creeping swoon of sleep. She felt as if she would like to dream, for all dreams were on the point of coming true.

"I'll just take a nap," murmured Jessie. "I don't want to sleep too long, there's so much to see and do. Tell Mr. Breen—"

But Jessie's head had scarcely sunk its full weight into the pillow before this new world of hers went out in sleep.

Still Mrs. Moss lingered in the room, meditating over the girl's home-made garments, over the things the girl had said, over the intimated facts of her flight from the "city" called Rising Sun.

She looked at Jessie. As yet she was undecided as to just what she ought to do; but, once again, in her flabby old heart the instincts maternal bubbled faintly with a tepid warmth.

"She ain't so good-looking as I was," Mrs. Moss reflected, almost aloud; "but she's *young!* If I was only young like that, and know what I know, I'd be riding around in automobiles, and I'd have my house on Fifth Avenue, and have a pew in the swellest church in town!"

The magnificence of this vision made her pant.

Some time later she summoned Jo, her half-witted cellar-man, and sent him over to the Grand Central for such baggage as Jessica might have left in the check-room there. Jo came back with a rather undersized suit-case of imitation leather.

This, in the privacy and solitude of her own room, Mrs. Moss opened. She found other home-made clothing in it, very neat and clean, but hastily packed. She found the little bottle of perfume, the ribbons and lace, which had thus far served as Jessie's stepping-stone to the larger luxury. She found the one book that Jessie had elected to bring along: Mrs. Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese."

"Poetry!" bubbled Mrs. Moss.

She essayed to read something in the book, but without success. Her old eyes were still good enough to read the scrawled accounts of the various merchants of the neighborhood who furnished her with her supplies. She could still get a certain amount of literary pabulum from the advertising bills which were occasionally thrown into her front hall. It had been a long, long time, though, since she had opened the covers of a book.

"So Jessie she reads poetry, too!"

Mrs. Moss let herself go on a fresh excursion into sentimental reminiscence, away back to Cremorne days.

"There was Agnes Le Motte," she recalled. "She wasn't any better than me—not near as good looking. But she could spout poetry. That's how she come to find that fellow who married her."

She repacked the suit-case as she had found it, carried it into the room where Jessie slept, stood again at the side of the sleeping girl, and looked down at her, trying to evolve a plan of action. She was, after a manner, like some ancient prospector of the West who has spent immemorial years in the quest of a bonanza; then, having found it, doesn't quite know what to do.

She was still standing there, poking about in the muddy depths of her life for a possible clue, when she heard a ring at her bell. She went out stealthily, yet hastily, to answer the summons.

There were two young men at the door—not much more than twenty, pleasant-faced, inclined to be rugged.

"Hello," said the foremost of the two.

"Good morning," said Mrs. Moss calmly. "Won't you come in and set down?"

The young men accepted the invitation, followed her back through the murkiness of the hall, made themselves to some extent at home in Mrs. Moss's room.

"What are you boys after now?" she asked.

"Same old thing," one of them answered, bringing a number of papers from his pocket. "Ain't seen none of these, have you?"

"I ain't, but you might as well read them to me so's I'll know if I do," said Mrs. Moss, with a semidetached friendliness. "You know I'm always willing to do all I can."

"Gotcha," said the youth with the papers, while his comrade rocked and looked about him with no great interest. "Headquarters keeps us running around asking for these squabs, but not one in a hundred ever turns up again."

And he began to read

"'Gussie'—no use trying to remember the names; they've forgot 'em theirselves by this time—'sixteen years old, big for her age, brown hair and eyes; distinguishing mark, big mole on her left shoulder; wore white middy-blouse and black skirt, white stockings and black shoes, when she disappeared. Hasn't been seen since the Fourth of July—'"

"Ah, come on, Bill," said the youth in the rocking-chair.

"'Annie Polak,'" the other persisted, with cheerful attention to duty; "'fifteen; don't speak much English; worked in a box-factory; looks like she was twelve; white skin, ash-colored hair, light-gray eyes; distinguishing mark, tip of the little finger on the left hand been cut off in a machine. Missing since August, after scolding by her father—'

"'Katie George; seventeen; well formed; black curly hair and rosy cheeks; wanted to be a moving-picture actress—'"

"Ah, come on, Bill," adjured his comrade; "we got to get on down the line."

Bill finally consented to put the papers away. But he still refused to be remiss to what he considered to be his duty. He addressed himself to Mrs. Moss.

"Anyway," he said, "no fresh squabs have come drifting your way here of late."

"You boys know me," said Mrs. Moss, with stealthy assurance. "You know me, and you know my house, and you know the neighborhood. Things around here ain't what they used to be. When a girl runs away to get a little pleasure out of life these days she don't come around a woman like me, nor a house like mine, nor this sort of a neighborhood. We're too quiet for them, too self-respecting."

"Same old kidder," said the young man called Bill, making a move as if he were going to chuck Mrs. Moss affectionately under the chin.

She smiled up at him, her mouth coming open and her lips puckering in.

"I know," she retorted, "because I was young once myself. You ought to have seen me. My hair came down to my knees. I had the prettiest pair of calves any girl ever kicked up in the Haymarket."

The two young men laughed. Bill patted her on her flabby shoulder. They went their way.

But, all the same, their visit had given a new direction to Mrs. Moss's thought. There crept into her chilly veins not only the lure but the thrill of the danger connected with the thing she had been visioning for the girl and herself.

She felt almost as if she had a daughter to protect.

Along toward one o'clock she began the slow and laborious ascent of the stairs to the second floor of her establishment. She came to the door of the small flat which now had long been the home of Alec Breen—the flat to which Alec had introduced Rufus Underwood, there where Viola Swan, nursing Rufus, had saved her own life, perhaps. Mrs. Moss softly knocked and listened.

A quiet snore was the only response.

Ordinarily, Alec Breen didn't begin to stir about until two o'clock or after. But Mrs. Moss didn't care to wait. She tried the knob. The door wasn't locked.

Noiselessly she padded her way in, and seated herself with a sigh on the foot of Alec's bed.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### RIGHT AND WRONG.

PRESENTLY Alec woke up. He was neither surprised nor startled to see Mrs. Moss seated there. Alec wasn't like some people, who, when they sleep, set their souls adrift, have a hard time to get them back again at the time of waking. Alec's soul, figuratively speaking, was always right on the job of life.

"This ain't rent-day, is it?" he inquired the moment he opened his eyes.

"I ain't saying that it is," Mrs. Moss affirmed craftily.

Now, thoroughly awake and at his ease, Alec propped himself a little higher on his pillow, his arms back of his head.

"I bet you don't know what I was dreaming about," he said, as he grinned up at his landlady amiably.

"I bet I do," bubbled Mrs. Moss, staring back at him.

"Bet you don't!"

"You was dreaming about a chicken; that was what you was dreaming about," Mrs. Moss affirmed, without humor.

Alec gave a slight start, showing plainly

that Mrs. Moss had guessed right. His grin disappeared for a moment, came back again with the advent of a logical explanation.

"I talked in my sleep," he said smartly.

"There wasn't no call for you to talk in your sleep."

Again Alec became thoughtful.

"How do you know I was dreaming about a chicken?" he inquired.

"Mebbe I've seen her," Mrs. Moss ventured.

"I got you there," crowed Alec in triumph. "This wasn't no hen. It was a darned old rooster. And he was all cooked, and I was taking after him with a sandwich-knife cutting the white meat off of him while he run."

"I guess you was the rooster yourself," Mrs. Moss propounded blandly; "and they'll be cutting the white meat off of you, if you don't watch out. You know what I'm talking about."

"Cross my heart," said Alec, freshly curious.

"I suppose sandwich-chickens was the only kind of chickens you was running after all the while you was away."

"Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies," Alec parried.

"And I suppose that one of them wasn't named Jessie Schofield, neither," Mrs. Moss pursued.

For the first time since his awakening Alec showed excitement.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"There ain't no call for you to try to hoodwink me, Alec," Mrs. Moss informed him. "Mebbe you'll be able to do it when I'm blind and deef, but I doubt it. I come up here, anyway, out of friendship for you. There isn't many a person I'd do it for. There's no give for me to meddle, anyhow."

She made as if to leave.

"Hold your horses," Alec begged.

Mrs. Moss subsided.

"I may want some advice," Alec confessed.

"That's what I'm setting here for," Mrs. Moss conceded.

"Where 'd you get onto Jessie?" Alec wanted to know. "She wasn't to get in here until to-morrow morning. I was going to meet her at the depot. She's a nice little kid. I knew you wouldn't mind."

"You got your gall," Mrs. Moss came back. "You give her my address. She's down-stairs now. What do you suppose I'm running here? A kindergarten? Don't you suppose I got a reputation to look out for?"

"Don't get huffy," Alec sought to soothe her.

"No, I won't get huffy, Alec. It's took me twenty years to build up my reputation. There ain't been a complaint against me nor my premises in all that time. You're a smart young man. Mebbe you think that it's all a joke, with those peanut reformers sticking their noses into everybody's business all the time. Mebbe you think it would be a joke if you got me drug to court!"

"How's that?"

"Running in kids on me like this!"

"Say," Alec declared, "if that's all that's biting you! Where have you got her? Let her come up!"

"You wouldn't be so brash," Mrs. Moss informed him, with mounting emotion, "if you knowed what I know."

"Ah, go on! Don't get huffy," Alec countered with persistent cheerfulness. "Listen at me. I'm telling you that this kid is all right. She's wise, I tell you. That was what I was doing all the time I was away. I was looking them over. You know me! Say, when I blew in among them in the little red jit, I had them all following me around begging me to give them a ride." He thought of a diversion. "You remember Viola?"

"I don't see how she's got anything to do with this."

"Listen at me! Viola and this little girl we're talking about were chums. You get that, don't you?"

"Who, her and Viola?"

"Surest thing you know! You know, up there was where Rufus — that friend

of mine—took Viola when he copped her out of this place. Well, Viola and this little Jessie, down-stairs have been thicker'n a pair of gumdrops ever since. You get me, don't you? The kid's a little Miss Wiseheimer, all right. You can bet your sweet life that Viola's wised her up."

"But Viola's changed," said Mrs. Moss. "You can't tell me. I know these Tenderloin girls once they've married and settled down. Strait-laced ain't no name for them. Sometimes I think that they're the only ones who are strait-laced."

Alec grinned. He put up a finger and, pulling down his lower eyelid, kept it that way.

"See any green?" he inquired cunningly.

"I've known too many of them," said Mrs. Moss non-committally.

"She fell for me, all right," Alec amplified with gusto. "I ain't saying that she hasn't changed, and I ain't saying that she'd fall for every one. But, say, just between you and I, Mrs. Moss, you know, when I blows in fresh from the little old town, with real clothes on and driving my own car, and a fresh line of chatter like they all like to get an earful of now and then, she melted to me like a hunk of butter on a red hot grill. It was all I could do to scrape her off of me when I got ready to come back."

"I think you're lying to me," Mrs. Moss announced.

Alec grinned, with a manifest desire that it be known there were certain corroborative details he could furnish were he so minded.

"Some kid, Viola!" he affirmed with pleasant reminiscence.

Mrs. Moss slammed down a trump-card.

"If she was so stuck on you why didn't you fetch her with you instead of this little country girl?"

"There ain't no flies on her either."

"Mebbe there are and mebbe there ain't," said Mrs. Moss, getting back to her original contention. "But you're a bigger fool than I've give you credit for, Alec. You're a bigger fool even than you must have took me for when you give her my address and thought that you could get by."

Alec began to warm up a degree.

"Now, listen at me," he invited again. "I'm as wise as the next one. You got to hand it to me for that. I didn't come down here and make good like I have because I was a country-Jake, nor anything like that. You've got to take off your hat to me for that."

"I'd forgot more than you'll ever know before I was dry behind the ears," Mrs. Moss put in.

Alec disregarded the claim. His brain was at work on a summary of the situation. His voice became persuasive. He bent himself to do a fine bit of special pleading.

"You don't get me," he said. "This little dame comes from one of the swellest families up the State. There ain't anything that she don't know. I couldn't help it if she got stuck on me. I'm only human. Have a heart! You can see for yourself that she's there with the looks. And she's a swell little dresser, too!"

"My God!" sighed Mrs. Moss.

"Wait a minute!"

"And listen at you calling that poor little hick a swell dresser! Honestly, Alec! If any one heard you pulling that line of talk they'd shoot you over to Bloomingdale so fast your hair'd fly out. She's only got two gingham dresses to her name. If she saw a silk stocking she'd throw a fit. Her hat'd make people laugh in Peoria. And as for her underclothes—honestly, Alec—she looks like she'd robbed a dago of his overalls!"

"You leave that to me," Alec advised, miffed.

"Do you know what it 'll cost to make her look decent?"

"I guess I got some money!"

"I'm only telling you, Alec. Her clothes alone will set you back fifty bones, Alec. Then, there's the beauty-

parlor, Alec. She's got to have her face bleached. You needn't shake your head. About the first good look she gets at the Merry-Merries she'll want to be as pink and white as the next one, Alec, and you can kiss yourself good-by to another fifteen. You're a piker, Alec. Don't you suppose I got your number? Don't you suppose I know the sort of a yelp you'll let go of when she wants twenty-five to get her hair marcelled? And all this is just the beginning."

"You're trying to kid me," said Alec.

"I ain't trying to kid you, Alec. I'm just talking to you like your own mother would. If you was *marrying* little Flossie down there you wouldn't get a cheep out of me. You can keep a wife on fifteen dollars a week, Alec. Some wives will stand for anything. That's why a lot of the natural born pikers *get* married—cheapest form of amusement in the world.

"But the money end of it is only one side of it, Alec, in the present case. If you was a rich young man, though, I still wouldn't say a word. But, you know, you ain't got any money to protect yourself if you get into trouble."

"Trouble!"

"What did you think I said?"

"What kind of trouble?"

"How about the girl's folks?"

Alec was relieved.

"Oh, I guess that's all right," he said, with a return of his grin. "I was slick enough to look out for that. She wanted to come along with me in the jit, but you can bet your sweet life I was too wise to take that sort of chance."

"Yes, you was!" said Mrs. Moss with mild sarcasm. "Now, you listen to me. I can see that you're beginning to get some sense. I didn't want to pull this on you, Alec, because I like you. I'm talking to you like your own mother would talk to you. Have all the pleasure in life you can. That's what I say. But, as soon as I see a nice young man doing something that might get him sent up then I feel like tipping him off."

"Shoot!" Alec commanded.

Mrs. Moss's final revelation lost nothing of its force through the length of her preamble.

"A couple of detectives were in here not more than fifteen minutes ago," she volunteered, "and they was looking for this girl."

Alec went green.

"I didn't bring her here," he faltered.

"Mebbe you did and mebbe you didn't," Mrs. Moss affirmed.

"She come here of her own free will," Alec blurted. "She wanted to know a nice place, and yours was the only number I really knew. What do you reckon we'd better do?"

"I ain't answering for 'we,'" Mrs. Moss pursued. "But I know what you'd better do."

"What's that?"

"Well, as soon as you're up — and there ain't no hurry about it — I'd sort of take a walk around town and think things over—how much I liked my job and the fresh air and my little red jit and everything. Then, if I decided that I loved this little boob of a country girl enough to risk all these things for and risking to turn out a jailbird instead of a sandwich-king, I'd stroll back here and say how-to-do to her. If I didn't think she was worth the risk I'd sort of beat it on down to my restaurant and begin frying eggs like my life depended on it. That's all."

"But what 'll she do?" Alec asked.

He was frightened, but not too frightened to be cunning. Mrs. Moss read his mood.

"You leave that to me," she bubbled.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE MAN WITH THE SCAR.

VIOLA SWAN was barely aboard the train she had flagged before it was sliding into speed.

Viola Swan was what she was.

Not little Mrs. Underwood, the farmer's

wife, could have done the thing she had just accomplished; nor could Mrs. Underwood—she who had once been Alice Linn, of Clear Spring, Maryland—carry out the work that lay ahead.

Only Viola Swan, once of the old Tenderloin, educated in the school of sham and shame, of lust and bitterness, was capable of that.

"Go on back into the car, and I'll try to get a chair for you," said the conductor at her elbow.

It was one of those limited trains consisting solely of what some people still call "parlor-cars." The passengers already on the train had the settled and proprietary appearance of the travelers on an ocean liner. But the majority of them had been stirred from their books, or papers, or somnolence, by the train's unexpected stop. As she emerged from the narrow passage leading back into the car from the platform, Viola Swan felt herself the objective of a hundred eyes.

She stood there for a moment, and felt herself once again wavering between two personalities.

One of them was Alice Linn, the country girl, who had become Mrs. Rufus Underwood. The other was that scarlet ghost which she had fought to annihilate. But it was the ghost which she summoned to her rescue now, into whose protective shade she crept as an adventurous wife of medieval times might have adopted a scarlet domino.

Viola Swan straightened up, swept her dark eyes over the interior of the car, saw the one vacant chair it contained.

Somewhere back of her was the porter carrying her grass-woven suit-case, but over her arm was still that red dressing-sack with which she had flagged the train. She was conscious of this; and was equally conscious that her clothing was not such as the ladies who travel in first-class trains usually wear. But up from her heart there flared a gust of almost cynical indifference to the stares of these people.

What did they know about the realities of life?

She found herself in the vacant chair, swung the back of it around to the car, and murmured a word of thanks as the porter deposited her suit-case at her feet.

As at a fading dream, she looked through the broad plate-glass of the window at the disappearing familiarities of the landscape. It had been a troubled dream, but beautiful. In silence she cried out to herself that it should not always be a dream. But there was a note of despair in the cry.

Her eyes filmed. For a space she was seeing nothing. When she again managed to look, there were no more familiarities left save that of the country's beauty—the still heavy foliage of the wooded hills, the lush but cultivated opulence of the lower slopes.

"Your fare, please!"

It was the voice of the conductor.

Viola Swan gave a start. It was a mere flutter of movement followed by a sort of paralysis.

She remembered now. She had no money!

In her haste she had forgotten all about money. In the dread that swept over her, there was a recollection that came to her red-hot out of the past. It was the demand for money when she had none which had slain her old self and brought into existence the ghost instead. The ghost had solved the money problem then. Was it going to be able to do so now? Her heart began to pound.

She turned and flashed her dark eyes up to the conductor's face. There was no conscious effort on her part to beguile him; but the conductor, under his professional mask of stolid indifference, must have sensed trouble in that look for both himself and the girl. He had been looking at her. Now, he suddenly shifted his attention to certain slips of paper he carried in his hand.

"I—I forgot—" Viola Swan began.

The chair immediately in front of her own was occupied by a man reading a newspaper.

Vaguely she had noticed this man while

making her way to the vacant chair. Then, as now, he had apparently been engrossed in whatever it was he was reading. Almost alone of all the passengers in the car he had not stared at her. So far as she had noticed, he had not even lowered his newspaper. She had not so much as seen his face.

Now, although he remained concealed, Viola knew that he was watchful, listening.

The conductor stooped forward, spoke softly.

"I must have your fare. You surely have enough money to Milford Junction. We'll be there in ten minutes."

"I wanted to go to New York."

"I'm afraid you've got me into trouble as it is."

"It was a question of life or death," said Viola Swan.

They were the only words that came to her. The accent she unconsciously gave them robbed them of their banality.

The passenger in the chair next her own lowered his newspaper somewhat.

"We're not supposed to take passengers, or put them off, at Milford Junction," the conductor continued, patiently. "But that's the last stop we make this side of New York. I'll have enough to explain. How much money have you?"

"None!"

It was a whisper. Mechanically she began to fold the red dressing-sack preparatory to putting it into the suit-case at her feet. That preliminary paralysis of dread had left her body, had become a paralysis of her powers of thought instead.

There was a long, a very long interval of suspense — several seconds, perhaps, while the click and rush of the train became crescendo, while Milford Junction rushed closer and closer upon her like a devastating dragon.

Was Milford Junction to be the terminus of her flight? She had heard about the place—a railroad junction simply, less than twenty miles from her starting point, far, far from New York.

The conductor was again ostensibly absorbed in his contemplation of those printed slips he held. The conductor's salary was none too large. He had a family to support. The discipline of the great company which employed him was like the discipline of an army perpetually in the field. A breach of its rules meant dismissal, which was an equivalent of death—to a man of his age. And yet, here was a flash of elemental womanhood throwing a new light on drab problems, transfiguring them, unsettling his judgments.

The conductor was elderly. He must have possessed some unusual qualities to have grown gray in the service, to be in command of a train like this.

Without appearing to do so, he watched the girl open the suit-case and press the red garment down. Up from the jumble of what else the suit-case contained there came a slight, invisible cloud of incense such as may have been offered, in ancient Greece, at the altar of Aphrodite.

"Have you any friends in New York?" the conductor asked, as Viola straightened up.

She was about to answer him, but took a second thought, and bit her lip. Then she shook her head. She couldn't help it, but the tears were coming. Knowledge of this brought an extra touch of color to her cheeks. She tried to speak, but her pink lips merely opened over her small white teeth.

The man with the newspaper now lowered it enough to look at her. He was wearing a cap. Only this, and the shaded eyes under the visor of it, were visible. The eyes were clear and gray.

Then, quite slowly, as if there were something momentous in the action, he lowered the newspaper.

"I beg your pardon," he began.

Both the conductor and Viola were looking at him. The face was pleasant enough—that of a man in good health, still young, intelligent, cleanly barbered. The only thing to mar the face was a

livid scar, of a wound only recently healed, jagged, a couple of inches long, high up on his right cheek.

"If the lady will permit me," the stranger pursued, speaking softly, leaning forward, to keep the interchange from the attention of the other passengers.

Viola gave a gasp. It was to have been a gasp of protest, but both the stranger and conductor interpreted it otherwise. They disregarded her quite—the conductor shifting closer to the stranger as the stranger brought out his bill-fold. They whispered together. Not even Viola could hear what was said by the two men.

The soothing, cultivated drone of the stranger's voice was all that reached her as she saw him pass some bills into the conductor's hand, saw the conductor prepare the receipt.

Only when the conductor turned to leave could she muster up strength enough to attempt a protest. She could have sobbed.

It was the stranger who answered her.

"That's nothing! That's nothing!" he murmured soothingly.

He had leaned a little closer to her. For the first time since Viola had entered the car they were face to face.

"Besides, I was in your debt," she heard him say. "I owed you something more than money, though. I owed you—an apology."

As he said this she saw that the scar up close to his temple was changing from pinkish white to red. There was something about the spectacle of this that fascinated her, but her eyes swept to his.

"I—I don't understand," she answered breathlessly.

"You don't recognize me," he said gently.

There was a forced smile on his lips, but the general expression of his face was rather one of pain than anything else, and the scar was flaming brighter still.

"You don't recognize me; but I recognized the place — back there — and I recognized you." He faltered. He stammered. "Have you forgotten that incident—of the crock of cream?"

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### BY WAY OF AMENDS.

RIGHT off, the situation struck her as incredible. Just now she had seen this stranger render her a service for which she would have bartered her life almost. There was no misjudging the action either. There was no pose in it, no condescension, no bargain of the sort which had sickened her and poisoned her in the old days, down in New York.

The action had been inspired by chivalry — her intuition told her that; chivalry plus that reason he himself had mentioned about his being in her debt.

Yet there was that scar on his face—the brand — which she herself had put there.

"You've placed me very deeply in your debt," she thrilled.

The stranger had made a movement as if to reopen his newspaper, willing to close the incident then and there if she so desired.

"It was nothing," he averred.

"I can at least see that the money is returned to you," she pursued. "As for your generosity in having offered it, that is greater than I can ever repay."

The stranger appeared to abstract a melancholy satisfaction from her words. A thought struck him.

"Since you have been good enough to accept the little amends I've already offered, won't you go further?" He reflected before he made his meaning clear, then again drew out his bill-fold.

He must have noticed the renewed flush in Viola's face, but it wasn't money he offered her — not immediately. He extracted a card. All his movements were thoughtful, distraught, fit to disarm the undesirable interest of any passengers who may have been looking at them. As a matter of fact, though, they were

almost completely shielded from observation by the high backs of their chairs. "I am—"

He handed her a card.

"Mr. Josiah Pennington, Gotham Club, New York," she read.

"That is my town address," he told her. Not quite sure of her attitude toward him, he shifted his gaze to the whirling landscape and continued: "I have a country place down near Elmira. I was taking a run into New York when I—when you—when we—"

"I shall get the money back to you at the Gotham Club, Mr. Pennington," she said hastily.

He glanced at her again. Their eyes met.

"I wasn't thinking of the money," he said with a rueful smile.

"I know."

"I was thinking of how I might convince you that I am not the — the bounder you have every reason for believing me. I don't know what got into me at that time. I guess it must have been—"

He became a trifle disconcerted. It was as if at the sight of that glowing face there in front of him he suddenly became aware just what it was that had "got into him."

Viola herself understood. She saw the flicker in his eyes. It may even have occurred to her that she was no longer either penniless or helpless or without a friend. There may have glinted in her brain some fragment of the old, original dream of dominion which every woman, consciously or unconsciously, carries about with her.

"You branded me for what I was," he said with a smile; "not for what I pretend to be, nor want to be. I suppose it's that which hurt so infernally much."

"I've got the same sort of a brand on me," said Viola Swan impulsively. The words surprised her after they were out. But the truth of them wouldn't be denied. "I don't blame you—not for anything. I am so sorry—so sorry—that I hurt you."

Her sorrow was genuine enough. Her voice was saturated with it. So was her face.

"I don't quite—gather your meaning—about that brand of yours," said Pennington slowly.

There fell between them a period of silence that may have lasted a minute. Their eyes had met and held—his, discerning, manifestly the eyes of a man of the world; hers startled, shy, yet resolute to keep nothing hidden.

"I understand; I beg your pardon," said Pennington.

He appeared to be increasingly troubled. Viola let her eyes stray to the window. They dropped to the little old suit-case. But it was several seconds before the focus of her sight could find an object so close.

At last, however, when she did take note of the suit-case it startled her as the sight of an object long lost might have done. It startled her so that she flashed her eyes to Pennington. She found him looking at her. They smiled at each other—the smile that might be exchanged by two veterans maimed in the same war.

Some whisper to Viola from that other self who was Mrs. Rufus Underwood told her that in speech there was refuge from what she felt to be her soul's nakedness. She spoke softly, hastily.

"There was a girl living in our village back there. She was a mere child. She ran off to New York. She had been with me a great deal. They blamed me for her going. I blamed myself, although I wouldn't have had the thing happen for anything in the world. I started out to bring her back."

"It was for that you flagged the fastest train on the road, forgot your money, forgot yourself."

"I knew what she was going to. She didn't."

"Do you know her address?"

"No. I can only guess."

Pennington took thought seriously. He looked at her, but his eyes for the time being merely passed over, went beyond her.

"I know New York pretty well," he volunteered modestly. "I've lived there more or less all my life." He was suddenly looking at her again. "You and I understand each other," he said with more directness than he had hitherto ventured to show. "We're friends. Tell me that we are."

"Yes."

Her voice was as soft as a caress.

"As a friend," he continued, "I'm not going to thrust myself upon you, but I'm going to ask you to let me help you."

"You've already helped me."

"Not more than you have helped me," he responded brightly. "You're helping me to get rid of this brand."

"Maybe I can get rid of my own," she whispered.

He let a few seconds elapse.

"You'll be able to get into touch with me almost any time at the Gotham Club," he said. Again he was reflecting. "If I'm not there and the matter is urgent—no, even if it isn't urgent, but you should wish to see me—call this number."

He took the card she was still holding. He penciled something on it and passed it back to her.

"In the mean time," he went on, less at his ease, "there is an immediate need that we both have to think about. Am I still your friend?"

"Yes."

"No one can see us. I want you to take this money."

"Oh, I can't."

"You must."

"How do you know—know that I can pay you back?"

The color flamed in her face. Her eyes were dark and liquid fire. She had wanted to say that she was ashamed. Her face said it for her. Pennington was trying to make the situation easy for both of them. He also was in difficulties.

Viola Swan was making the same sort of an appeal to him as she had made back there in the springhouse that day he had called at the Underwood farm in his touring-car, that day this woman had struck not at him so much as she had struck at the thing that had followed her out of the old Tenderloin.

"You've dropped your handkerchief," said Pennington in tones that others might hear.

He stooped, then he leaned back in his chair again.

Viola Swan, looking down into her lap, saw that he had placed there a folded packet of green and yellow bills.

Milford Junction had ceased to be even so much as a memory. The fast train had swung into a rhythm of high speed which seemed almost planetary, something which could never alter or have an end. Rivers, mountains, cultivated valleys, villages, and towns reeled away—at a mile a minute, a little more, a little less.

Suddenly it occurred to Viola Swan that something else had become likewise almost less than a memory.

For, with every mile she put behind her, deeper still into the oblivion went that personality of hers that had been Mrs. Rufus Underwood. Like the facts of the physical landscape, visible through the car-window, went the dissolving facts of her recent existence in and about Rising Sun. More yet, each mile carried her further yet into the magnetic field of New York.

The human magnet! The implement fashioned of steel and cement, of blood and brains, which spread the currents of its attraction out to the very fringes of the world! In drab and monotonous towns, in isolated farms, in distant States, boys felt the quiver of its electric appeal in their brains, girls in their brains and hearts.

Viola Swan herself felt the thrill of it now, and recognized it for what it was.

New York was drawing near.

It was the voice of New York which kept calling to her:

"You're Viola Swan and you belong to me!"

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE OLD PLACE.

SHE had dined with Pennington while the train, like an animate thing inflamed with love, sped on to keep the tryst.

New York!

And she was in a taxi, Pennington at the door of it trying to give a matter-of-fact atmosphere to their leave-taking.

"Good-by," he said. "Good luck!"

Their fingers fluttered in contact. It was a tremulous moment when the slightest psychic jolt might have sent either of them or both of them toppling into at least some little demonstration of the sentiments which inspired them.

Both knew this, perhaps. Both certainly knew that small flames easily become disastrous conflagrations when the circumstances are right.

The door of the cab banged shut. A wait, and the car was digging its way into the thick of the shuttling traffic.

It was Pennington who had given the chauffeur the address. Viola Swan had remarked the deft glint of worldly knowledge in his face when she had told him the number of that street "in the Thirties." Something of the same look was there when she told him that, so long as she was in New York her name would be—Viola Swan.

Now that Pennington was gone into that limbo of things unseen, it surprised her when she recalled how many things she had told him. But Pennington himself surprised her, now that she came to think of him in perspective—in that perspective of all the other men she had ever known. He had shown himself to be almost as surprising as Rufus himself.

She was glad that Pennington had not attempted to kiss her, as he stood there at the door of the taxi. She might have yielded, if he had sought to kiss her—yielded out of friendship, out of gratitude, out of contrition.

But that would have been damnable indeed, after having accepted money from him, even as a loan.

She tried to tell herself that she was glad to be alone.

No use!

This was New York, the familiar, in the first glitter of the young night. The sky was still pallid — all dim pinks and blues; but against this the mass of the city was a sort of gemmed and constellated blackness, crude and vociferous, brazen and mighty, as indifferent to individual yearnings and heartbreaks as the Harlot of Revelation.

Out of all this there came to Viola Swan a whiff of cold fear.

It made her shrink back a little deeper into the musty shadows of the vehicle, sprayed her over with a fine tremor of uneasiness.

At the crossing of Forty-Second Street and Sixth Avenue—a corner which, as she remembered it, was forever slimy and black however clean and bright the rest of the city might be—the taxi came to a halt to let the north and south-bound traffic pass. An open automobile with four or five young bloods in the body of it drew up close to the taxi and also stopped.

"Hello, kid," said one of the boys, peering into the taxi.

He had a broad and good-natured, not overly intelligent face; but Viola Swan felt as she might have felt had she found herself confronted by a devil. She recognized the type — the type of the human puppy, heavy of paw and awkward of movement, which plays with a butterfly. The companions of the boy who had spoken sought to pull him back into the car. He resisted.

"You're some queen, birdie! Listen—"

A whistle sounded. The taxi jerked softly into motion. The other car swept on.

On through Forty-Second Street the

taxi trod its way, closer and closer to that center of the Beauty-Mart, where the day-shift was now going off, the night-shift coming on.

The whole gigantic spectacle of it flooded in upon Viola Swan as if through other channels than the sense of sight.

She saw the multitude of faces, each face a mask, many of them painted; but, painted or not, a mask graven to the lineaments of joy and prosperity, of bright expectation and overwhelming good luck.

"Masks! Masks!" she said.

And again:

"That's the quality of this street. I had forgotten it, I guess. But the thing is to look as if you were happy, or famous, or both, whatever might be gnawing at your heart—or your stomach."

The sky-signs flamed and danced, wriggled and volcanoed—one of the seven and seventy wonders of the modern world; but the human floods torrented this way and that and gave no apparent attention. To Viola Swan herself there was only one element of the colossal display which caught her attention. It was the dial of an enormous clock outlined in electric lights and framed with a red proclamation to the effect that it was high time to drink a highball.

But the clock was running. The indicated hour was correct.

Seven forty-five!

Twelve hours ago Jessie Schofield's train had arrived. What had happened to Jessie in this interval? Where was she now? Would her own quest for the missing girl be brief or long? In the mean time, what would Rufus think? Would his love for her and, above all, his faith in her, resist this assault upon them?

She gave a little gasp.

Yes!

In him — and in herself — her own faith was so deep that she had never paused to consider any other possibility. Nor did she now. But some gleam of the pure and pallid sky came to her as of something so remote from all that lay about her — as remote as the music of the Unadilla itself—that it was as if she had had a glimpse of the very face of that youth who had married her.

Up from the taxi jolting into Seventh Avenue from Forty-Second Street, and up from the crowded turmoil of clangor and pretense, her spirit fled. For a few moments there it was as if she and Rufus were alone, locked in each others arms.

Rufus understood.

The taxi swung into a darker region. It went a little slower. It came to the Street of Strange Smells.

Nothing had changed. The street remained as indifferent to her return as it must have been to her departure. It was always indifferent. How often she had noticed this!

In the old days, when this was all that was left to her of "her own, her native land"—then had it paid no more attention to her own particular tragedy than it might give to the passage of a seventy-five-dollar funeral.

There was the Chinese restaurant, the Cuban cigar-factory, the costumer's shop with its tawdry display of royal robes. There was the row of slatternly boarding-houses, the delicatessen store, the laundry, the French dyer's, the—

The taxi slid in toward the sidewalk and stopped at the curb.

Viola Swan gave one glance at the ground-glass door with its circlet of red panes — like the red rim of an old and watchful eye. But one glance was all she did give just then.

She felt that she would never have the strength to go on if she permitted herself to begin to think and look too much just then—while she still had the taxi there to help her to flee, while she still was free from Mrs. Moss's lethal touch.

She read the taxi-dial, and paid the chauffeur. He swung his car about and trundled off to the street's indifference.

But for several seconds Viola Swan stood there on the curb where the chauffeur had left her. Her suit-case was on the pavement at her side. Back of her,

like a rational entity — watchful, cruel, waiting for her and sure of her ultimate fate — Mrs. Moss's house stared at her with its red-rimmed eye.

"Come in! You might as well come in!"

So had it spoken to her a little more than a year ago. She could hear it saying the same thing now.

She sought to reason with herself. The house was respectable enough. Hadn't Mrs. Moss herself declared the fact over and over again? And, whatever Alec Breen's shortcomings, Alec certainly worked hard enough, and was honest enough in his own way; yet Alec had found this house a satisfactory home. Moreover, as she knew from experience, Mrs. Moss had had other tenants equally respectable — a vaudeville couple and three hard-working chorus-girls.

Viola Swan, a decision reached, picked up her suit-case and fled across the sidewalk to the waiting door.

She rang Mrs. Moss's bell, then entered the familiar lobby.

The lobby had a smell of its own—of dry dust tinctured with some hint of synthetic perfume. This air was like a whiff of chloroform to her. It made her slightly giddy and a little sick. She looked at her former letter-box. In the tiny square which once contained the name of "Viola Swan," there was now a soiled slip of paper bearing the two words: "Manicure—Massage."

Without warning, the door opened. There blinked up at her a face with pale and staring eyes, a bulbous nose, a mouth that slowly extended—more and more, past all belief—into a grin of recognition.

"Deary!"

"Hello, Mrs. Moss!"

"So it's really you! My little Viola Swan!"

"Not Viola! — but Alice Linn — Mrs. Rufus Underwood!"

"Lord bless your sweet self whatever name you're going under!" Mrs. Moss exuberated reverently.

She clasped the visitor in arms which were singularly strong for a woman of her age, especially one who never took any exercise in the open air; pressed her visitor to her flabby bosom and bestowed upon her a kiss which was like the crawling contact of a snail.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE LOCKED DOOR.

MRS. MOSS'S quarters at the rear of the hall had changed no more than the street had done.

In the center of the sitting-room was the table with the red cotton cover. A little to one side of it was the rocking-chair. Other chairs were scattered about —all more or less dilapidated. Against one wall was a writing-desk where Mrs. Moss performed her clerical labors and kept her accounts. On the wall itself were various lithographs, advertisements chiefly, and a few colored photographs of ladies showing their stockings and smoking cigarettes.

From this room was visible the alcove which, by courtesy, might have been called a bedroom; likewise the noisome cavern which, by courtesy, became a kitchen.

"Set down," said Mrs. Moss.

There was a sort of scurrying cordiality about Mrs. Moss. Viola Swan had never seen her less phlegmatic.

Viola sat down on the edge of the rocking-chair, cast a startled glance in the direction of the window which blindly stared out on the dirty white of the airless air-shaft and cast another startled glance all about her.

"You're a little fatter than you was and twice as good looking," Mrs. Moss flattered her. "There ain't no use talking, a little vacation picks you right up when you get run down. And then, when a girl looks nice and healthy like you, she can make more money in a day than a lot of these here limp-as-a-dishrag girls can make in a week. That's what I keep

telling them. 'No wonder you don't bring down the coin,' I says; 'you look like a consumptive!' I suppose you'll be after those old rooms of yours. I was just thinking about you this afternoon—how glad I'd be to have you back."

Viola Swan shrank back at hearing herself thus addressed. Out of the shadows of herself Mrs. Rufus Underwood emerged.

"I've come here to get Jessie Schofield and take her home," she said. "You know—Alec Breen's young friend. I hope that no harm has come to her."

Mrs. Moss had discovered that the key of her writing-desk wasn't properly inserted in the lock. She managed to fix the key, but only at the expense of considerable effort. Her smile was still on her face as she turned. She hadn't quite understood.

"What's that, deary?"

Little Mrs. Underwood repeated what she had said, making an effort to show no trace of the excitement throbbing in her breast.

"What did you say the name was?" Mrs. Moss asked.

"Jessie Schofield!"

"I never heard of her, Viola."

"Do you mean to say that Alec Breen never mentioned her to you?"

Mrs. Moss reverted to classical form.

"You know me, Viola. I run a nice respectable apartment-house. That's me. I ain't give to inquiring about the friends and the affairs of none of my tenants. When you was here; did you ever have to kick about me inquiring the names of your gentlemen friends?"

"This is different. Jessie Schofield is a child. To some extent I feel responsible for her. If I didn't I shouldn't be here now. We might as well be frank about this thing, Mrs. Moss. I've come to New York to get Jessie Schofield and take her home. I'll turn heaven and earth to do this. And I'll turn heaven and earth," she added, speaking more slowly, "to see that some one suffers if she's been injured in any way."

Mrs. Moss swam over to the glass door looking out into the hall. She stood there peering out for a dozen seconds.

"Just set here and make yourself comfortable for a moment," Mrs. Moss whispered. "I just see that frowzy manicure come in with a pint of beer in a tin bucket. I'll settle her hash. I've told her this was a respectable house."

She disappeared through the door with a speed little short of amazing, also a perfect silence.

Mrs. Underwood sat in the rocking-chair unable to think, inactive save for a strained but idle expectancy of some sort of an outbreak from the hall. But from the hall no sound came.

Gradually, Mrs. Underwood faded, and it was the personality of Viola Swan which emerged instead. It was Viola Swan who suspected some trick, suspected that Mrs. Moss had lied. It was Viola Swan who got up from the chair and ran silently toward the door.

Too late!

Mrs. Moss herself was just returning and it was she who opened the door. At sight of Viola Swan Mrs. Moss clapped a hand to her breast as one might who is short of breath.

"She run up the stairs," panted Mrs. Moss; "and now she's went and spilt enough suds on the carpet to keep the place stunk up for another month. I never see such a girl. She ain't got any more sense of decency than a cockroach!"

"I thought I heard you call me," said Viola Swan, explaining her own presence at the door.

"That was me bawling out the manicure," said Mrs. Moss, slyly. "Now, what was it you was saying about this—what was her name—Bessie?"

Viola Swan didn't answer immediately. She had started back in the direction of the rocking-chair, and now came to a wilting stop; and turning, flashed her eyes upon Mrs. Moss in a scrutiny which that good woman hadn't in the least expected. Mrs. Moss's only recourse was to smile. But that smile might have

meant anything—from murder to harmless lunacy.

"Viola," Mrs. Moss mumbled from the midst of her smile, "I declare that now that I see you here again I feel almost as if you was my own daughter. I always did feel affectionate to you."

"Then, help me," said the girl. "I'm in need of help, and you can help me. I know that this child has had her head turned by something that Alec Breen told her. You know that Alec was up in our part of the country on his vacation."

"I thought he was down in Long Island some place," said Mrs. Moss with a blank look.

"Well, he wasn't. He came up to Chenango County. He took this child for a ride. Heaven only knows what he might have told her."

"Alec couldn't never fool no woman without she was insane."

"This wasn't a woman. It was a child. I'm going to take your word for it that she isn't here. I'm going down to his restaurant. I know where it is."

Mrs. Moss had an inspiration.

"He may have snuk her in here," said Mrs. Moss. "Suppose we go up there and have a look."

Viola sat down. She knew that if Jessie Schofield was in Alec's little flat, Mrs. Moss would be aware of the fact. If Mrs. Moss suggested that they go upstairs it must have been for some ulterior purpose of Mrs. Moss's own. But Mrs. Moss's mental movements were sagacious and cunning, hard to follow. Now she was talking again.

"It's God's own truth that I've been telling you, Viola," she declared in apparent recognition of her visitor's trouble. "I can sympathize with you. Don't I know? Why, scarcely a day goes by but what some of them young detectives from headquarters—nice young boys they are, too, and good spenders; useful friends for any girl to have—a friendly tip for you, Viola — what was I saying? Oh, yes! Scarcely a day goes by but what they're up here asking my advice about the day's batch of missing girls. An awful sight of girls skip out, Viola; a raff of them! And I can't say that I blame them very much either. They got a right to get some sweetness out of life."

"Poor little fools!" said Viola Swan. "They'd be better dead."

"That's what I'm telling you," Mrs. Moss agreed. "The boys from headquarters know that them's my sentiments. You wouldn't see me letting a girl waste her chances. No siree! She ought to be—"

"At home!"

"—with some one who's got enough sense to see that she gets what's coming to her. There!" exclaimed Mrs. Moss. "Here I am gassing away like an old wind-bag, and you all tuckered out. If I was you I wouldn't go down to Alec's to-night. Besides, he was just telling me about his having been transferred over to Hoboken or somewheres.

"If I was you I'd stay right here until he comes home in the morning; and then me and you can surprise him like. I'll settle his hash if he's been doing any dirty tricks. He knows I won't have anything like that on my premises."

"What time does he come home now?"

"Never later than two or three," Mrs. Moss lied, after due reflection. "I know, because when I hear him I knock on the floor for Jo down in the cellar to look at the fires. Alec's my clock."

"I'll wait for him here," said Viola Swan. "I'm tired. I don't know which way to turn."

"When you don't know which way to turn, turn in," Mrs. Moss advised. "You take off your shoes and your corsets, too. Go in and lay down on my bed while I make a little sassafras tea. I bet you know what sassafras tea is, you being a country girl."

"I remember my mother making it when I was a little girl."

"Well, you just let Mother Moss be your ma for a while," the landlady suggested amiably. "Go ahead! Take off your things. You may need such strength

as you've got. You might as well freshen up a bit."

Mrs. Moss retreated into her kitchen.

There was no questioning the soundness of the advice she had just given. Mechanically, Viola took off her hat. She scraped her low shoes from her small feet with a familiar movement, and loosened her stays. It would be three or four hours yet before Alec came home. Even the dubious hospitality Mrs. Moss offered her seemed attractive when she thought of the streets through which she had so often walked at this time of night, fearful, not always alone.

"Go right in and stretch yourself out a bit," Mrs. Moss called from the kitchen. "I'm going to mother you a little. It 'll do you good."

Viola did so. Dressed as she was she went into the alcove, and, letting down her hair, threw herself back on the bed and composed herself to think.

"Drink this," said Mrs. Moss, through the twilight.

Viola took the cup. The concoction was steaming, but not too hot. She sipped it.

As she did so, it was as if the form of the old landlady became the uplifted head and neck of a mighty serpent there to destroy her—there to destroy all goodness in the world, all faith in human kindness.

It was sassafras tea. She recognized the pungent fragrance of it. But with that sip she had taken her brain recorded a second perception.

Chloral!

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

# LOVE'S TAPESTRY

## BY LANNIE HAYNES MARTIN

IF you could weave at will that wondrous, rare,
Ethereal fabric, Love's rich tapestry,
What threads of Life would you select most fair,
What color and what texture would they be?

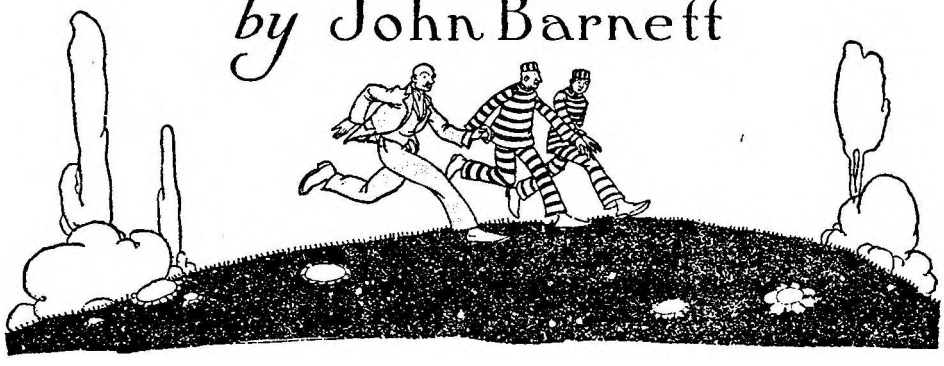
Not sudden Fancy's gleaming scarlet flash,
Not evanescent Passion's purple shade,
Should there in hideous combination clash
If I the woof and warp with shuttle made.

But umber-tones of Earth's brown every-days
Should show a path where two had upward gone;
A far, blue mountain, wrapped in sapphire haze,
Should symbol where their Hope had met the Dawn.

The amber of old memories should glow
Beside the rosy shimmer of desires—
Ah, had I such bright yardage here to show,
Think ye I'd have to advertise for buyers?

# Posh Luker — His Memoirs

by John Barnett



## I—A CHANGE OF CLOTHES

THE warder in charge was needlessly overbearing and officious. It seemed to Mr. Posh Luker and his two companions in misfortune that he never left them alone for a moment. The man quite got upon their nerves with his "Stand straight there!" and "Hold your blooming tongues, can't you!"

The position was undoubtedly trying to a nature proud in its way, such as Mr. Luker's.

The three convicts in prison dress were standing upon the platform waiting for their train.

It must not be thought that Mr. Posh Luker was unduly sensitive. The situation was no novelty to him. He had worn prison clothes and handcuffs in public several times before; he had endured the curious gaze of luckier travelers who stared as though beholding wild animals attached to a circus.

These trifles in themselves would have left Mr. Luker comparatively cold. But his position was a proof that he had failed in the profession of which he considered himself a distinguished member, and it was that thought which hurt his quite extraordinary vanity with some sharpness. Also it is not to be denied that he strongly resented the bullying of that warder.

However, he contrived not to show his resentment. An idea had come to him, and for its accomplishment it was necessary that the warder should entertain no suspicion of possible trouble.

So Mr. Luker, a man not without a certain greatness, concealed the anger that was hot within him, and quite gratified the ready conceit of that warder by his cringing obedience and politeness.

He did not even beg, as was his usual custom, for "a bit of snout" or tobacco,

from staring members of the general public. And he contrived to whisper a word to his companions which brought about a corresponding meekness in their attitudes.

The warder was quite pleased, but not surprised. He had always been filled with admiration for his own methods of discipline.

The train came in at last, and the four clambered into the third-class carriage reserved for their accommodation. The warder lowered the blinds upon the station side, as a hint to the public that they had stared enough, and then settled down for a comfortable journey.

Certainly the prisoners were looking harmless enough at the moment. Each of the three was doing his level best to give the impression that butter would not melt in his mouth.

And their undoubted success was something of a triumph, seeing that in the case of two of them at least their efforts had been handicapped by nature.

Take Mr. Posh Luker, to begin with. He is a gentleman for whom I confess to a certain respect, but there is no doubt that his natural countenance suggests a certain truculence.

He was at this date about forty-five years of age, and the outline of his once athletic figure had become somewhat blurred. Mr. Luker, when at liberty and in funds, had always made a habit of doing himself pretty well. And he had never been one of those people who love exercise for its own sake.

But his figure was thick-set and comfortable rather than fat even now, and was certainly suggestive of strength. His hair was red and his eyes small and twinkling. Mr. Luker, whatever his faults, possessed humor.

Then there was Slippy Williams. He was a tall, lean man, and, as Mr. Luker remarked dispassionately to me when telling this story:

" Poor old Slippy's face *does* tell ag'in' him in his perfession and when he's in court."

His profession, I gathered, consisted in appropriating articles displayed outside shops—without violence when possible. Slippy, I was told, had always hated violence since the day when he had an argument with a man in seedy black whom he mistook for a retired missionary.

It was Mr. Williams's bitter misfortune that the man turned out to be a retired prize-fighter.

At the moment Mr. Williams had practised his profession once too often, and had three years hard labor before him. He was doing his very best to look honest and humble, in response to Mr. Luker's whisper, but it was perhaps fortunate for his companions that the warder in charge was blinded by his own complacency. Otherwise he must have had his suspicions of Mr. Williams.

As Posh Luker remarked to me:

" It's all a matter of luck. Some faces, like mine, look honest, and some don't. Slippy's don't."

It was easier for Spots Duggan to play his part. Providence had given him a pale, miserable face which had been invaluable for the purpose of softening the hearts of some few prison chaplains. He was a ratlike man, very small and light, and he owed his nickname to an unfortunate complexion.

Picking pockets was the branch of crime at which he specialized. He had been heard to speak with real bitterness about the contemptible habit of carrying gun-metal watches which many people have contracted in these hard times. He had even suggested that he might be driven by this habit into earning an honest living.

But, according to latest advices, he has not come down to that as yet. It was a fine, large, old-fashioned gold watch which had got him into trouble upon this occasion. It had cost him two years hard.

As for Mr. Luker, he seems from his own account to have been a victim to prejudice and interference on the part of the police. I gather that he was found

in a gentleman's dining-room at three o'clock in the morning.

A certain decent vagueness shrouds his entry into that dining-room. It is, of course, possible that he lost himself in the fog during an innocent stroll and was "fair bewildered" to find himself in that strange place. Almost anything is possible, but it is not always easy to persuade an unsympathetic judge and jury that some things are probable.

Especially when a man's unfortunate past is dragged up against him, and there is that incomprehensible prejudice on the part of the police to be reckoned with. There seems to have been a decanter of whisky in the dining-room, and I presume that Mr. Luker, a careful man in regard to his own health, took steps to guard against a chill; but, as I say, the whole story is vague.

Finally, Mr. Luker glanced up (from the decanter) to find a gentleman with a revolver and a policeman with a truncheon glaring at him in a markedly unfriendly fashion. He attempted explanations, and, when they were received in an absurdly churlish spirit, he let his honest indignation master him.

The struggle seems to have been prolonged and very damaging to the furniture. Anyhow, it all meant four years hard for Mr. Posh Luker.

And now you know how and why those three unfortunate citizens found themselves simulating meekness in the train in that officious warder's charge.

Their plan was simple. The fact that they were handcuffed together upon a chain would not hinder them greatly at close quarters. They were well aware that a long run was coming with no stops.

Spots Duggan and Slippy Williams were only waiting for the signal from Mr. Posh Luker, their leader both by right of years and a natural inclination for giving orders rather than taking them.

The warder was just opening his mouth for another unnecessary order when Posh Luker coughed—and the three were upon him like a flash!

It all happened quickly.

Mr. Luker grabbed the man's throat and squeezed it sufficiently hard to ensure silence. The other two secured his hands. The train was rocking, and the four rolled upon the floor in a struggling heap.

Mr. Luker and his allies were hampered by the handcuffs and the connecting chain, and so, as their leader remarked, if they hurt the fellow more than they meant to, it wasn't *their* fault.

The warder ceased to struggle in a minute or two, seeing that resistance was hopeless, and the victors settled down to a discussion of the situation.

Mr. Luker spoke first, as is a leader's right.

"The first thing to do," he said, "is to get these blamed bracelets off."

Spots and Slippy agreed with enthusiasm, but the warder did not seem gratified by his position.

"You be warned by me, my men," he said. "Don't you go on no more with this silly lark. You'll only hurt yourselves. You can't do any real good. Sit back again in your seats, and if you behave yourselves I may forget all about it!"

Certainly, as things stood, matters were painful for that warder. At best he was likely to get little credit from his superiors at the journey's end.

"You shut up, you old deceiver!" Posh Luker adjured him sternly. "I can just *see* you forgetting all about it! Why, if we was mugs enough to take you at your word, I can hear you pitching a tale about the dangerous mutiny as you quelled in the train, thanks to your cool courage! Not 'alf! You ain't going to get no promotion out of us! Hand over the key of them bracelets!"

The warder perceived that Mr. Luker was not the man to succumb to blandishments. He handed over the key, and the handcuffs were off in a twinkling.

"And what do we do next?" Slippy asked.

"The fust thing to do is to tie up this

old turkey cock and gag his long-tongued mouth," Posh Luker answered thoughtfully. "Then we shall have to leave the train, of course."

"While it's in motion?" Slippy inquired nervously.

Spots Duggan sneered at his fears.

"It's ag'in' the regulations, ain't it? But we shall 'ave to do it, all the same!"

But Mr. Luker had been thinking hard, and now one of those bright ideas came to him which lifted him above the ruck of his fellows in crime.

"No, we won't!" he said. "We'll get out at the next station like blooming passengers! There ain't no need at all to risk our precious necks!"

Slippy cheered up at once, but Spots Duggan was not so easily satisfied. There was always something of the natural rebel about Mr. Duggan. He did not fail to show that he resented Mr. Luker's airs of leadership.

"How are we going to work that?" he asked with frank distrust.

"Because I've got a plan," Posh Luker told him with cool firmness. "You listen to me, Spots, and then thank your stars that you're working under a man who might 'ave been prime minister if he 'adn't 'ad other ambitions! Fust of all, I'm going to change duds with this old turkey cock!"

"You're going to do what?" the warder asked hoarsely.

Mr. Luker gave the fellow a withering look.

"Don't let me have to speak twice," he told him. "Take off your coat, trousers, and boots and let me have 'em. In return you shall have these fancy garmints of mine."

The warder's temper mastered him.

"I'll—I'll see you somethinged first!" he said fiercely.

Mr. Posh Luker gazed at him fixedly, and there was something in his small, gleaming eye which made the warder realize his position very clearly. He weakened.

"That's right!" said Posh Luker approvingly. "Buck up and change, young feller me lad. We're keeping close watch on you, mind. If you makes a move to the cord or calls out, you won't never know what hit you!"

The change of costume was duly carried out. It took some little while, but, as Mr. Luker was aware, there was a long run before the next station. He tells me that that warder was far from possessing his own graceful figure, but his clothes didn't fit so badly, considering.

"And now, what next?" Spots Duggan wanted to know, still distrustful.

"Tie this laddie buck up hand and foot and gag him so that he can't squeal," Mr. Luker ordered quietly. "And then take and shove him under the seat!"

And it was done. It was judged best to gag the warder first of all, because he seemed so anxious to say all that he thought of Mr. Luker—whole pages of it! Then he was securely bound with strips torn from his own shirt and placed as gently as possible under the seat. As Mr. Luker remarked: "We couldn't help the dust under the seat. Them careless porters oughter be blamed for that."

"And now, what next?" Spots asked again.

"You two will have to put on them bracelets once more," Mr. Luker replied.

"No; I'll be tarred and feathered before I do!" Spots broke out.

Mr. Luker was patient with his unruly follower, as a great leader has to be.

"We get out at the next station," he said, speaking as though to a little, fractious child. "Don't you understand *yet*, Spots? You're two blooming lags with a blooming warder in charge. No one will stop us or ask questions."

"Ho, yes!" Spots retorted jealously. "Who'd take *you* for a warder? A blind man in blinkers?"

By way of answer Posh Luker pulled on the warder's peaked cap.

"With my kind, respectable, honest face I'd pass anywhere," he said. "But what I want to know is, 'ave you anything better to propose?"

And Spots hadn't. He shone more brilliantly as a critic than as an originator of ideas. Many people do.

"But what do we do when we've left the station?" he grumbled. "We can't wander about in bracelets for the rest of our blooming lives!"

Mr. Luker was still patient with him.

"One thing at a time," he told Spots mildly. "Perhaps we shall have to crack a crib for a change of duds when it gets dark. But meanwhile this ruse of mine will get us clear of the train."

This suggestion appealed to Slippy Williams. Anything that lessened the chances of bodily hurt was what Mr. Williams liked. Spots Duggan saw himself outvoted, and so gave in ungraciously.

But Mr. Luker's masterly mind foresaw trouble. He did not like the jealous, carping spirit shown by Mr. Duggan. However, that gentleman and Slippy put on the bracelets again, and a few minutes later the train slowed down and stopped at a station.

It was then that once more Mr. Posh Luker revealed his adaptability to circumstances. No one, he assures me, could have told the difference between himself and one of those vipers known as warders who get their living by bullying better men. He has studied too many warders in his time not to know their methods.

He had Spots and Slippy out of the train in no time, and he hectored them right along the platform. Indeed, he did it so naturally and with such artistry that once Spots Duggan was within an ace of turning upon him in real earnest!

The porter collecting the tickets seemed quite taken in by the warder's fine manner. Mr. Luker merely waved his hand to him haughtily, and he let them through without a word.

The passengers stared, of course, but it was getting dark, and in a minute the strange trio found themselves walking along a quiet country lane.

They heard the train rattle away, and Posh Luker heaved a heartfelt sigh of relief.

"Thank Moses!" he muttered. "That warder under the seat hasn't managed to choke out his gag!"

But directly they were alone there was more unpleasantness. Spots Duggan went on displaying that unpleasing spirit of rebellion. He stopped short in the middle of the lane.

"Look here, Posh!" he said. "I'll be sugared if I'll stand being 'ectored about by you!"

Mr. Luker was a little hurt.

"What I done, Spots, was for your own good entirely," he said reasonably. "Who'd ever have taken me for a proper warder if I hadn't made a regular, officious, overbearing nuisance of meself? It wouldn't 'ave been true to life. You oughter know what warders are like yourself, Spots!"

Mr. Duggan admitted that there was something in that, but he complained that the leading actor had gone altogether too far.

"There was no need to threaten to rub my nose on the asphalt platform!" he said bitterly. "And I won't *'ave* it, Posh, so you may as well understand that, soon as later!"

Posh Luker shrugged his plump shoulders. What was a leader, however able, to do with such unpromising material? However, Slippy Williams supported him, and the two contrived to pacify the injured Mr. Duggan.

The journey was resumed, but when a while later they came in the dark to a little public house among the woods, Spots Duggan gave further trouble.

"I'm dead beat and starving," he announced. "Let's go in and have some grub and something strengthening to drink. If you're the actor you think you are, Posh, you can kid the landlord into serving us. You can demand whatever you blooming well want in the name of the king. It'll be quite legal, being in uniform."

"I dunno about that," Posh Luker answered. "It'll look fishy, us going in. You don't want to queer the game."

"I want a drink," Mr. Duggan said obstinately. "And I mean to have one. Besides, we can pay for what we get if it comes to that. There's the money in that warder's pockets. Yes, there is! Did you think as 'ow you was going to stick to it yerself?"

Mr. Luker reflected that Spots was a disheartening creature to lead and no mistake! He would have been glad to wash his hands of him. And he could, of course, have given his companions the slip easily enough if he had wished to do so. They were handcuffed and could not run fast, and he himself was in a disguise that might have passed him anywhere with due prudence.

But Mr. Posh Luker had his virtues, and it had never been his way to go back on a pal.

"There was seven and ninepence in his pockets," he said wearily. "Come into the pub, Spots, and drink it all up, and then be took quite comfortable!"

But his sarcasm was wasted on Duggan.

"Lead the way in, old son," that wilful gentleman answered brightly. "You're the Cook's man in charge of this little outing!"

So, sorely against his better judgment, Mr. Luker led the way into the public house.

The landlord stared queerly at the little party from behind the bar, and Posh Luker was conscious of anxious qualms, but he carried off the situation with a high hand.

"I want a private room and some grub at once," he announced grandly. "I'm conducting these 'ere criminals to Lewes Prison. There's been some hitch about the van sent to meet me and the criminals—"

Spots Duggan coughed at this point. It was a thoroughly nasty cough.

"You're a good way from Lewes," the landlord said doubtfully. "Got out at the wrong station, didn't you?"

"The trains was wrong," Mr. Luker explained with hasty mendacity. "There's been a nasty accident on the line. We want some grub at once, seeing as we're very hungry, me and these abandoned criminals—"

Spots Duggan coughed again. As Mr. Luker reflected bitterly, Spots was always cruel hard to please.

"Who'll pay me for it?" asked the landlord. He seemed to be a man sadly lacking in simple faith.

Posh Luker waved a lordly hand.

"I'll give you an order on the home secretary, me man," he said magnificently. "Just take us to a private room without more jaw!"

The landlord obeyed, but Mr. Luker did not care about his manner at all. If he had ever seen a suspicious man, it was that landlord! He left the three in a room, but the food seemed to be a long while coming. And while they waited the leader of the party had his hands full.

Spots Duggan began again with his complaints.

"Strike me pink, but it's poor enough fun for me and Slippy!" he grumbled. "Being led all over the country in bracelets, and being called criminals by a fat, second-hand burglar!"

And at that Mr. Luker, much tried himself by all that he had gone through, lost his own temper and spoke to Spots Duggan very plainly! They made quite a noise between them. But no one came into the room. And the food did not come either.

"I don't half like it!" Slippy said suddenly. "There's somethink wrong! I can 'ear people whispering in the passage outside!"

"There can't be nothing wrong," Posh Luker answered shortly. He was racking his brains to think of some new adjective that might really lacerate Mr. Duggan's callous feelings.

"That warder may have got rid of his gag, and they may have wired along the line," Slippy said nervously. "'Ave a look outside, keerful like, Posh."

Mr. Luker has never been one who be-

lieves in taking advice too readily from his subordinates, but he was becoming somewhat anxious himself, and so he advanced with caution to the door of the room.

But there was no need to open it! He heard the landlord speaking to some one in a guarded whisper. And he caught the words "Police," and "surrounding the house"!

There was no time to waste! Posh Luker produced the key and whipped the handcuffs from the wrists of Spots and Slippy before they could wink.

"They're getting round the house!" he hissed. "Thank Moses this room looks out on the back! Don't waste no time in arguing! Let's just get through that blooming window!"

And they got through it with very creditable activity and sprinted down a little garden and over a hedge into the woods. Their flight was hastened by a yell. The police had been just ten seconds too late!

The trees and the darkness saved the fugitives. For what seemed an endless time they ran at top speed, bruised by tree trunks in the gloom, and tripped and torn by bushes. And through all that desperate flight Spots Duggan never ceased grumbling as he fled!

Posh Luker had made a mess of everything as usual! If they'd only done what Spots had wanted, everything would have been very different! This was what came of being bossed by a fat old fool who thought himself cleverer than anybody else.

Posh Luker listened to these complaints with not unjust resentment. All his breath was needed for the retreat, but there arrived a moment at last when his feelings were too much for him. He came to a gasping halt and faced Spots Duggan in the moonshine of a little clearing.

"I've had enough of your jaw!" said Mr. Luker with a quiet and alarming ferocity. "Anything that's good and sensible *I've* done, and everything silly *you've* made me do! It was you as made us go into the pub ag'in' my better judgment. And now you're still grousing! Well, I'm four stone good heavier than you, and by snakes, if I 'ear another word of grumbling from you I'll up and bash your stupid head clean in against a tree!"

Spots Duggan kept quiet after that. Politeness, as Mr. Luker remarked to me, is fair wasted on some people. They don't understand it. You have to speak plain to them!

By about one in the morning the trio were dead beat and very sick of these apparently endless woods. It was with a gasp of pure thankfulness that they caught sight of the lights of a house among the trees. They had had nothing to eat for many hours and were more or less desperate.

"We'll get some grub or bust!" Posh Luker announced. "Come on, it's well out of the beat of the police anyway. Only a blooming hermit would live out here. He seems to sit up pretty late anyhow."

The owner of that lonely house was in his dining-room. The night was close and hot, and the long windows were open to admit the air.

Posh Luker and his followers marched across the lawn and straight through those windows without any preliminary investigation.

They saw before them a man of sixty with a face noticeably pale. It did not seem possible that that face could ever smile. It took even Posh Luker aback for the moment, and "fair gave him the shivers."

But, as he admitted to me, that strange householder had beautiful manners. Nothing seemed to surprise him, and he did not take the trouble to ask any useless questions. He did not even rise from his chair as the three outlaws entered, all of them dirty and disheveled, and two of them in those tell-tale garments.

"Good evening, gentlemen," he said with a slight bow. "It is good of you to take pity upon my solitude. What can I do for you?"

"We could do with a bite of grub, mister," Posh Luker told him.

"And lush," added Spots Duggan.

"And 'baccy and a change of duds," put in Slippy Williams.

The householder bowed again.

"It will be a privilege to supply your needs," he said. "Will you not be seated, gentlemen? With your permission I will wait upon you myself, rather than disturb my servants."

He did them proud, as Mr. Luker admits ungrudgingly. He brought in a big cold pigeon pie, a tongue, an apple tart, and cheese. The strange guests set to with a ravenous will, and their host sat by with a solemn, kindly air, as though it did him good to watch such appetites. And when the meal seemed drawing to a close he put a seal upon his hospitality by remarking:

"And now, gentlemen, if you have any special preference in the way of liquor—"

"Mine's gin, guv'nor!" Spots said rudely.

"Whisky is *my* special tipple," Slippy announced.

But Mr. Luker's manners have always been more polished.

"I wouldn't wish to give you no trouble, mister," he said genially, "but if you *'ave* such a thing as a bottle of rum, a full bottle, with a very little hot water handy—"

The host bowed once more and quitted the room. When he returned the eyes of his guests brightened at sight of the tray he bore.

It held a bottle of rum, a bottle of gin, and a bottle of whisky. Certainly, here was a man who did things handsomely!

It seems best to let Mr. Luker end the story in his own words:

"So far, mister, I remember everything quite clear, but after that there comes what you might call a blank. I suppose I must 'ave had some kind of apoplectic seizure very sudden. So must Spots and so must Slippy, by a most unfortunate coincerdince. But these things *will* happen at times.

"When we came round from the seizure half a dozen nasty perlicemen were pouring cold water on our heads!"

**The second story of this series will appear next week. It will be called "RATS IN A TRAP."**

# A MODERN COR(R)ESPONDENT

BY MARGARET G. HAYS

THE bundle of love-letters,
Tied up with ribands blue,
Was quite passée before the time
Of me, dear heart, and you—
Such 'criminating evidence
As notes, or *billets doux*,
In these days of divorce courts,
Would never, never do.
The telephone is quite a help
In feeding love's hot fires.
But even then, my lady fair,
Look out for those crossed wires!

# Nuala O'Malley

by H. Bedford-Jones

Author of "Malay Gold," "The Ghost Hill," "John Solomon, Supercargo," etc.

## SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

THE scene is laid in Ireland during Cromwell's time, when the whole country was in arms for or against the various parties. Brian Buidh, or Brian of the Yellow Hair, himself The O'Neill, comes home from Spain, where he had been brought up to fight for his country. After a mysterious warning from the Black Woman, an old hag, he wins forty men from O'Donnell More, the Black Master, by a trick, and wins the friendship of Turlough Wolf and Cathbarr of the Ax. His intention is to gather a storm of men and hold an independent place near Galway. He forms an alliance with Nuala O'Malley, known as the Bird Daughter because of her carrier pigeons, for the purpose of recovering her castle, Bertragh, which O'Donnell had won years before from her parents by black treachery.

By warlock arts O'Donnell More brings Brian and a handful of men through a snowstorm to Bertragh and makes him prisoner. He proceeds to torture him fiendishly, ending by nailing him to the castle door by one hand. Just then Colonel James Vere, British officer, arrives, and demands Brian in order to hang him comfortably in Galway. Red Murrough, O'Donnell's lieutenant, agrees, for the promise of ten English pounds, to pretend that Brian is worse off than he is so that he may take longer to recover. Cathbarr comes in, and offers to take Brian's place if O'Donnell will release Brian; and when the Black Master makes fun of him, he goes berserk and cleans out the hall, escaping with Brian to Nuala. Then they besiege and best O'Donnell, who escapes.

Brian goes after O'Donnell with a couple of hundred men, having recovered from his hurts, and all but catches him in a valley, just as he is working some kind of a divination with a bowl of water. Brian gets back his Spanish sword, but O'Donnell escapes with some of his men, and Brian loses all of his in chasing him to keep him from joining with his pirate friends. Brian and Turlough get back to Bertragh exhausted. He goes cruising with Nuala, and they meet a small vessel laden with wine and food for some of O'Donnell's men. Brian goes back with it to Bertragh, while Nuala goes on to Gorumna Castle, her own home. But the captured wine proves to be poisoned—it is a trick of the Black Master's.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### BRIAN YIELDS BERTRAGH.

"I DARE not trust birds alone in this strait, Cathbarr. Go to that galley with the two O'Malleys and hasten to Gorumna. Bid the Bird Daughter stay and wait further word from me; but take those hundred men of mine with her galleys, and hasten back. If the beacon on the tower is burning, I will be here; if not, and if I can make terms, I will meet you at that tower of yours. Now hasten!"

"But—"

"For God's love go, or my heart will burst!"

Brian sank down on the horse-stone with a groan, and Cathbarr, catching up his ax, fled through the open gates and was gone into the night. Brian gazed up after him, and on the hills he saw that dim beacon-fire heralding the Dark Master.

The six men guarding the galley, two of them being O'Malleys, and three men who had watched on the tower, were all that remained alive in Bertragh besides

Turlough and Brian. The men had drunk deep of that poisoned wine; when Con Teague and his men tried to get away after a few had died, they were slain. But so swift was the poison that only one of the O'Malleys had lived to reach Brian.

The fires still burned brightly, and before some of them meat was burning. Sitting in blank despair on a horse-block, Brian saw the dead bodies of a few less than a hundred men lying there. Turlough Wolf and his six gave over trying to put life into any of them, and now the old man came and put his hand on Brian's shoulder.

"Where has Cathbarr of the Ax gone, master?"

Brian told him dully, and Turlough nodded approval, having at length learned all the story of how that galley had been taken.

"Master, there was deep cunning in this. O'Donnell sent that galley to you, or, rather, to the Bird Daughter, and he had spies watching. Had the Gorumna men drunk of that brew, he would have fallen on there; but here came the galley, and now he comes over the hills. And we are few to meet him."

"We will be more when the men come in from the hill-roads before him," and Brian rose up with heavy heart, forcing himself to the task. "Send out a man to haste them in and to warn what men there be at the farms. Also let him send a wagon or two, that these dead may be carried out before the Dark Master falls on us. Send two men to the tower to build a beacon, for Cathbarr will not be back before to-morrow night."

Brian went to the stables where the three carrier-pigeons were caged, and fetched the cage to the great hall. Here he wrote what had happened, with his plan, in small space, fastened it under the wing of a bird, and let loose the pigeon from the courtyard.

Stunned though he was by the sudden and terrible blow, Brian had seized on the only course left him. If he could make shift to hold the castle at all, he would do so; if not, he must make terms and get off to Gorumna that he might take vengeance for this dastardly stroke that had been dealt him.

Nuala had nigh three hundred men in her castle, and he felt that all was not yet lost, even should he have to yield Bertragh. The Dark Master would hardly have a large force with him, and he would know nothing of those hundred men Brian had loaned Nuala; so Brian reckoned that if he could get away, O'Donnell would think him a broken man who could do no further against him.

"Well, that's looking too far ahead," thought Brian very wearily. "Perchance I am broken, indeed, since I have lost two hundred and a half of men without gain."

An hour later rode in a score of men with wagons, and fell to work getting the dead out of the castle, though for burying there was no time. This score, and two more who came in later, were all the men left to Brian; they reported that the Dark Master would be on them by daybreak, with two hundred Scots troopers and one horse cannon.

"His friends proved niggardly, then," laughed Brian drearily. "We have but to hold the place till to-morrow night, friends, and the O'Malleys will relieve us. Now, one man to watch and the rest of us to rest, for there is work ahead."

Brian, indeed, got some sleep that night, but it was shot through with visions of those poisoned men of his, and their twisted faces gibbered at him, and he thought they shrieked and howled for revenge. When he was roused at dawn, he found the meaning of those noises, since a great storm was sweeping down out of the west, and the farther wore the day, the worse grew the storm.

"Is Heaven itself fighting against us?" he thought bitterly, watching the sea from the battlements. "Against this blast Nuala cannot reach me, if she will."

He got little time to brood, however. Before he had broken his fast the Dark

Master's horsemen came in sight—two hundred braw Scots, with wagons and a cannon following after. It was no large force, but Brian found afterward that it was the best the Dark Master could get, since the Galway Irish cared nothing whether the Scots lived or died.

They halted and spread out, half a mile from the castle, and Brian saw that the men were being quartered on the farms round about. Bitterly he wished that he had his lost men, for with them he could have sent those Scots flying home again; but now he was helpless.

With the gates shut and the bastards loaded with bullets to sweep the approach, Brian sent his twenty men to the battlements and watched, with Turlough beside him. It was plain that no offensive operations were under way as yet, and an hour passed quietly; then ten men rode down to the castle under a white flag, and foremost of them was the Dark Master.

"Now, if I were in your place, master," said Turlough, slanting his eyes up at Brian in his shrewd way, "I would loose those bastards and sweep the road bare."

"You are not in my place," said Brian, and the Wolf held his peace.

The Dark Master looked at those bodies piled between the castle and the shore, and it was easy to see that he was laughing and pointing them out to the Scots. At that Brian heard his men mutter no little, and he himself clenched his nails into his palms and cursed bitterly; but he forbade his men to fire and they durst not disobey him. The party rode up under the walls, and the Dark Master grinned at Brian standing above.

"You have great drunkards, Yellow Brian," he called mockingly. "Have all your men drunk themselves to death?"

Brian answered him not, but fingered his hilt; even at that distance the Dark Master seemed to feel the icy blue eyes upon him, for his leer vanished.

"Yield to us, Yellow Brian," he continued, shooting up his head from betwixt his shoulders. "I do not think you have many men in that castle."

"I have enough to hold you till more come," answered Brian.

"Mayhap, and mayhap not," and O'Donnell laughed again. "Keep a watch to seaward, Yellow Brian, and when you see four sail turning the headland, judge if those two caracks of the Bird Daughter's are like to help you."

"If you have no more to say, get you gone," said Brian, feeling the anger in him rising beyond endurance. The Dark Master looked along the walls for a moment, then signed to his men, and they rode off through the driving snow again.

Turlough looked at Brian and Brian at him, and the same thought was in the minds of both. If those Millhaven men had four ships driving down before that storm, as seemed probable enough, the Bird Daughter's two little caracks would never land men under the guns of Bertragh.

About noon the snow fell less thickly, though the storm had risen to great power, and Brian made out that the Scots were bringing forward that cannon of theirs. Having some little knowledge of artillery himself, he drew the charge of bullets from a bastard and put in more powder, then put the bullets back, a full bag of them. He did the same with two more of the bastards on that wall, and when the Scots had halted aimed all three very carefully, and set men by them to fire at his order. The Scots were turning their cannon about, a score of men being in their party, and Brian judged that they were eight hundred paces away—just within range of his bastards.

"The Dark Master lost this hold because he had too many men," he said to Turlough, "and we shall lose it because we have too few; but we will make better use of these shot than did he. Fire, men!"

The three men brought down their linstocks and ran for it, having seen that extra charge of powder set in the cannon. But none of the pieces burst, though they roared loud enough and leaped at their recoil-ropes like mad things. When the white smoke shredded down the wind,

Brian's men yelled in great delight, for those Scots and horses about the cannon were stricken down or fleeing, and the piece had not yet been loaded.

"They will get little joy of that cannon," said Brian grimly, and went in to meat.

During the rest of the day the cannon stood there silent, dead horses and men around it; nor was any further attack made. Brian knew well that having found him prepared, the Dark Master would now attack at night and hard did Brian pray that the storm might abate from the west, or at least shift around, so that Nuala's ships could come to his aid.

Instead, the gale only swooped down the wilder, and seemed like to hold a day or more, as indeed it did. About mid-afternoon Turlough came and beckoned him silently out to the rear or seaward battlement and pointed out.

No words passed between the two men, nor were any needed; beating around the southern headland were four flecks of white that Brian knew for ships coming from the west with the storm, and he saw that for once the Dark Master had told the truth.

"I have some skill at war," he said to Turlough that afternoon when they had seen the four ships weather past them and anchor a mile up the bay; "and since the Dark Master's troopers are also skilled at that game, they will fall to work without waste of time or men. We may look to have the dry moat filled with fascines to-night and our gates blown in with petards. At the worst, we can hold that tower, where the powder is stored."

If he had had more men, Brian would have slung the bastards down from the high walls and set them in the courtyard where they could sweep the gates when these had been blown in. But they weighed a ton and half each, and there was no time to build shears to let them down, even had they had spars and ropes at hand. So Brian set them to cover the approach, and had the smaller falcons brought down to the courtyard, all five, where he trained them on the gates and loaded them with bullets heavily.

"Turlough and I will fire these ourselves," he told his men that evening as they made supper together, the men looking forward to the night's work with great joy. "Do the rest of you gather on either hand by the stables, with spare muskets and pistols."

So this was done as he said. Because of the storm Brian did not light his beacon after all, but he stocked the tower with food and wine, and told his men to get there, if they could, when the rest was taken. That tower had Brian's chamber in the lower part and a ladder in the upper part, where was great store of powder.

The five falcons were set in front of the hall doorway, where once Brian had come near to being nailed. Brian loosed another of the pigeons, telling Nuala how things chanced, and of the four pirate ships, and set the last bird in the tower in case of need, which proved a lucky thing for him in the end.

Brian and his men slept after meat, while Turlough Wolf remained watching. It was wearing well on to midnight when the old man woke them all, and Brian went to the walls to hear a thud of hoofs and a murmur of men coming across the wind to him. He sent off men to loose the loaded guns on the outer walls at random, and then suddenly flung lighted cressets over the gates.

A wild yell answered this, and bullets from the men who were filling the dry moat, while others scrambled across it and charged up to the gates with small powder-kegs and petards ready. This was not done without scathe, however; Brian's men loosed their muskets, and one by one the heavy bastards thundered out across the snow, though the result was hard to see in the darkness.

There came a ragged flash of musketry in reply, and that abandoned cannon roared out lustily, though its ball passed far overhead. Brian stood on a demi-bastion that half flanked the gates, and

after firing his pistol into the men below, he leaped down the steps into the courtyard and joined Turlough behind the falcons.

"One at a time, Turlough. They'll have the gates down in a minute.

While he waited for the storm to fall, Brian saw that two or three of his men had been hit. He wondered dully that the Dark Master had not made a general assault, and concluded that he must wish to save men. It was a long moment that dragged down on him; then a splash of light burst up, the gates were driven inward and shattered, and with a great roar there fell a rain of riven beams and stones and dirt.

Sheltering in the hall doorway, Brian and Turlough stayed unmoving through an instant of black silence. Out of it broke a wild Scots yell, and in the light of the courtyard cressets a wave of men surged up in the breach. Brian's linstock fell on a falcon, and the little gun barked a hail of bullets across the Scots; Turlough's gun followed suit, and the first lines of men went down in a struggling mass.

The Dark Master was not to be beaten this time, however. Another wave of Scots swept up, with a mass of men behind them. While some of Brian's men tried to get the two falcons reloaded, a storm of bullets swept across the courtyard, and Brian saw Turlough turn and run for it through the doorway, while two of the men fell over a falcon.

But as the first line of men broke into the courtyard, Brian fired the remaining three cannon as fast as he could touch linstock to powder. The bullet-hail tore the front ranks to shreds, but through the darkling smoke-cloud he saw other men come leaping, and knew that the game was up.

On the next instant his men had closed around him, muskets were stabbing the powder-smoke, and Brian fell to work with his Spanish blade. O'Donnells and Scots together heaved up against them, but Brian's point weaved out between cutlas and claymore and bit out men's lives until the mass of men surged back again like the backleash of a wave that comes against a wall.

Brian heard the Dark Master's voice from somewhere, and with that muskets spat from the gloom and bullets thudded around him. One slapped his steel cap away and another nicked his ear, and a third came so close across his eyes that he felt the hot breath of it; but his men fared in worse case than that, for they were clutching and reeling and fallen, and Brian leaped across the last of them into the hall with bullets driving at his backpiece.

As he ran through the hall he knew that his falcons had punished O'Donnell's men heavily, and that his twenty men had not fallen without some payment for their lives. None the less, Bertragh Castle was now lost to him and to the Bird Daughter; but he thought it likely that he would yet make a play that might nip O'Donnell in the midst of his success.

In this Brian was a true O'Neill and the true luck of the Red Hand had seemed to dog him, for he had lost all his men without suffering a defeat, and now that he was beaten down, he was planning to strike heaviest.

He gained the tower well enough, and found Turlough there to receive him, with food and wine and loaded pistols. They soon had the door of the lower chamber fast barred and clamped, and Brian flung himself down on his bed, panting, but unwounded to speak of.

"Now sleep, master," said the old man. "They will search elsewhere, and finding this door closed will do naught here until the morning."

Brian laughed a little.

"It is not easy to sleep after fighting, Turlough. I think that now I will send off that last pigeon, so give me that quill yonder."

With great care Brian wrote his message, telling what had passed, and saying that he hoped to ride free from the castle next morning. In that case he would be

at Cathbarr's tower before evening came, and he told Nuala to have all her men landed there at once, since she could hope to do nothing by sea against the pirate ships.

When the writing was bound to the pigeon's wing he loosed the bird through the seaward casement, and bade Turlough blow out their flickering oil-light.

After eating and drinking a little, they lay down to sleep. Men came and pounded at the door, then departed growling; but Turlough had guessed aright. The Dark Master was plainly speeding the search for Brian elsewhere, and since there was no sign of life from the powder-tower, he did not molest this until close to dawn. Then Brian was wakened by a shock at the door, and he heard the Dark Master's voice outside directing his men. Still he seemed to have no thought that Brian was there, but wanted to get at the powder and into his own chamber again.

Brian took up his pistols and went to a loophole opening on the battlements, while Turlough still crouched on the bed in no little fear. Finding that the Dark Master stood out of his sight, Brian fired at two of the men under the door, and they fell; then he raised his voice above the shouting that came from outside.

"O'Donnell, are you there?"

The uproar died away, and the other's voice came to him.

"So you are trapped at last, Brian Buidh! Now yield and I promise you a swift hanging."

"Not I," laughed Brian curtly. "There is no lack of powder here, O'Donnell Dubh, and one of my men holds a pistol ready for it."

At this he glanced at Turlough, who grimaced. But from outside came a sudden yell of alarm, and Brian saw a few fleeing figures, while O'Donnell shouted at his men in furious rage. Brian called out to him again:

"Give me a horse and let me go free with the one man left me, or else I will blow up both tower and castle, and you will have little gain for my death."

"Would you trust my word in this?" cried the Dark Master. Brian smiled.

"Yes, as you must trust mine to leave no fuse in the powder when I am gone."

Then fell silence. Brian hated O'Donnell, as he knew he was hated in return; and so great was the hatred between them that he felt instinctively he could trust the Dark Master to send him out free. It seemed to him that the other would sooner have him go broken and crushed than do him to death, for that would be a greater revenge. Moreover, the Dark Master could know nothing of those men at Gorumna and would have little fear of the Bird Daughter.

And it befell exactly as Brian thought.

"I agree," cried the Dark Master, stepping out in the dawn-light boldly. "You shall go forth empty as you came, Yellow Brian. What of those two-score men you owe me?"

"The time is not yet up," returned Brian, beginning to unbar the door, and he laughed at the mocking voice.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### BRIAN MEETS THE BLACK WOMAN.

"THE storm is over, master, or will be by this night."

"Too late now, Turlough."

Brian and the old man stood in the courtyard, while the Dark Master was seeing to horses being made ready for them. Drawing his cloak farther about his hunched shoulders, the latter turned to Brian with a mocking sneer.

"Now farewell, Brian Buidh, and forget not to repay that loan, if you can gather enough men together. When you come again, you will find me here. A merry riding to you. *Beannacht leath!*"

Brian looked at him grimly.

"Your curse would make better company than your blessing, O'Donnell," he said, and turned to his horse with no more words.

The Scots who were standing around gave vent to a murmur of approval, and

Brian saw the black looks passing between them and the wild O'Donnells. The Highlanders had done murdering enough in Ireland since Hamilton brought them over, but they were outspoken men, who had little love for poisoners; and as Brian settled into the saddle with his huge sword slung across his back, he caught more than one word of muttered approval, which the Dark Master was powerless to check.

So Yellow Brian rode out from the castle he had lost, with Turlough Wolf at his heels, and his heart was very sore. Once across the filled-in moat and he saw fifty men at work by the shore, loading the dead into boats to be buried in the bay, for the ground was hard-frozen.

Parties of Scots troopers and the horseless O'Donnells were scattered over the farmlands and country ahead, but these offered no menace as the two horsemen rode slowly through them. For all his bitterness, Brian noted that the four pirate ships had been brought around into the bay before the castle, into which the Scots had moved, while a great number of the O'Donnells had landed and were hastily throwing up brush huts on the height above the shore, evidently intending to camp there for the present.

That was a dark leave-taking for Brian, since he had lost so many men and his castle to boot. Yet more than once he looked back on Bertragh, and when they came to the last rise of ground before the track wound into the hills and woods, he drew rein and pointed back with a curt laugh.

"This night I shall return, Turlough, and I think we shall catch the Dark Master off his guard at last. If we throw part of our men on that camp at dawn and the rest upon the castle, the tables may yet be turned."

"A good rede, Brian O'Neill," nodded the old Wolf approvingly. At thus hearing his name Brian flung Turlough one lightning-swift glance, then pulled out his Spanish sword and threw it high, and caught it again with a great shout.

"Tyr-owen! *Slainte!*"

With that he put spurs to his horse and rode on with better heart, striving to forget his troubles in thinking of the stroke he would deal that night. If those three pigeons had won clear to Gorumna, he would find Nuala and her men waiting at Cathbarr's tower, and before the dawn they would be back again and over the hills.

So they rode onward, and presently came to a stretch of forest, dark against the snow. Suddenly Turlough drew up with a frightened glance around.

"Master—what is that wail? If I ever heard a banshee, that is the cry! Beware of the Little People, master—"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Brian, drawing rein also and listening. He heard a faint, sobbing cry come from ahead, and so mournful was it, so charged with wild grief, that for an instant his heart stood still, and the color fled from his face.

"It is some woman wailing her dead, Turlough," he said at length, although doubtfully. "Yet I have never heard a *caoine* like it; but onward, and let us see."

"Wait, master!" implored the old man. "Let us cut over the hills and go by another path—"

"Go, if you are afraid," returned Brian, and spurred forward. The other hesitated, but followed unwillingly, and a moment later Brian came upon the cause of that mournful wailing, as the trees closed about them and the road wound into a hollow.

The dingle was so sheltered by the brooding pines that there was little snow, except on the track itself, and no wind. Under the spreading splay-boughs to the right was what seemed to be a heap of rags and tatters, though the wailing cry ceased as the two riders clattered down, with Turlough keeping well behind Brian.

The latter drew rein, seeing that the creature under the pine-boughs was some old crone whose grief seemed more bitter still than his own.

"What is wrong, mother?" he cried cheerily. "Are you from one of the Bertragh farms?"

The tattered heap moved slightly,

and a wrinkled, withered face peered up at him.

"Nay, I come from farther than that," and to his surprise there was a mocking note in her voice, though it was weak. "That is a good horse of yours, *ma boucal;* he must trot sixteen miles to the hour, eh?"

"All of that, mother," returned Brian, wondering if the old crone was out of her senses. "Was it you whom I heard wailing a moment ago? Where is your home?"

The old woman broke into a cackle of hideous laughter.

"My home, is it? Once I had a home, Yellow Brian—and it was in Dungannon, with Tyr-owen and Cormac and Art and the noblest of the chiefs of Ulster to do me honor! Have you forgotten me, Brian O'Neill, since we met at the Dee Water?"

Then Brian gave a great cry, and swung down to earth, for now he recognized the Black Woman. But as he strode toward her she tried to rise and failed, and forth from the midst of her rags came a quick gush of red blood. Brian leaped forward and caught her in his arms, pitying her.

"I knew you," she gasped out weakly, clutching at his shoulder. "I knew you, son of Tyr-owen! You had yellow hair, but your face was the face I once loved, the face of the great Hugh—"

She stopped abruptly, and her words were lost in a choking gasp as blood came from her mouth. Brian swore.

"*Mile Mollaght!* What has happened here, woman? Are you wounded?"

"Aye, those dogs of O'Donnells," she moaned feebly. Then new strength came to her, and she peered up with another cackle. "But did I not tell wisely, son? Have you not found Cathbarr of the Ax and the Bird Daughter even as I foretold?"

"Yes, yes," returned Brian impatiently. "Where are you wounded, mother? We can take you—"

"Peace, avic," she cried. "They came on me last night, and my life is gone. You shall take vengeance for the old *calliagh,* Brian — but first I must talk. Do you know who I am, avic—or who I was, rather?"

"How should I know that, mother?" answered Brian. "Old Turlough Wolf, yonder, swears you are some witch—"

"Turlough!" The hag raised herself on his arm, cackling. "So the old Wolf is still living! Do *you* know me, Turlough? Do you remember the sorrowful day of the earl's flight?"

Old Turlough, who had ridden closer, bent over and looked down, fear in his face. Suddenly he straightened up again with a wild cry.

"Noreen of Breffny! By my hand, it is the earl's love!"

"Aye, the earl's love!" she gasped out, falling back. "I was his love in truth, Yellow Brian, and he loved me above all the rest, though another's hand closed his eyes and laid him to earth in Rome. I knew you would come, Brian—I saw you at Drogheda, though you saw me not, and I bade you come here into the West, and I have watched over you—"

She coughed horribly, clutching at Brian's arm. He stared down at her in amazement, for the incredible story seemed true enough. This old hag had been that Noreen of Breffny of whom he had heard much—the fairest maid of the North, whom the great earl had loved to the last, though the church had not blessed their union.

Brian's old Irish nurse had often told him of the "Breffny lily," and it was bitter and hard to realize that this ancient hag, withered and shrunk and done to death by the Dark Master's men, had been the fairest maid in Ulster. She gasped out a little more of her story, and Brian found that his wild surmises had been true; after seeing him and recognizing him for one of the earl's house, she had instantly led his mind to this part of the country, being aware of the strife between O'Donnell and Nuala

O'Malley. It had been a crazed notion enough, and since then she had kept as near to him as possible in the half-sane idea that she might help him.

How she had managed to do it ever remained a mystery to Brian, since his marches had been none of the slowest, but she had done so.

"Where are — your men?" she exclaimed after a little. Brian told her what had chanced at the castle, and she broke out in a last wild cackling laugh.

"Tyr-owen's luck!" she cried. "Betrayed and blasted, betrayed and blasted —but the root of the tree is still strong, Yellow Brian — give me your blessing, master—give Noreen your blessing before you go to Rome, Hugh *mo mhuirnin*—"

Brian's face blanched and his hands trembled, for he saw that her wandering mind took him for his grandsire.

"*Dhia agus mhuire orth*," he murmured, and with a little sob the Black Woman died.

Silence fell upon the dingle, as Brian gazed down at the woman his grandfather had loved, and whose love had been no less. Then Turlough pushed his horse closer, looking down with a shrewd leer.

"Said she not that it would be a black day when you met her again, master?" he queried with awe in his voice. "I think—"

"Keep silence!" commanded Brian shortly. "Get down from that horse and dig a grave."

"But the ground is frozen—" began old Turlough in dismay. Brian gave him one look, and the old man hastily dismounted, crossing himself and mumbling.

Brian joined him, and they managed to scoop out a shallow grave with knife and sword, laid the old woman in it, and covered her up again. It was a sorry burial for the love of the great earl, but it was the best they could do.

Shaken more than he cared to admit, Brian mounted and rode on in silence. As he had thought, there was nothing supernatural about this weird Black Woman, except, perhaps, the manner in which she had contrived to keep close to him. She had warned him at the Stone Mountain, and she must have been keeping close to Bertragh ever since, unseen by any, with her unhinged mind driving her forward relentlessly.

"Poor woman!" he thought darkly, gazing into the hills ahead. "There has been little luck to any who ever followed an O'Neill or loved an O'Neill! And now it seems likely that the same ill luck of all my family is to dog my heels, bringing me up to the heights, only to cast me down lower than before. Well, I may fall, but it shall not be until I have dragged down the Dark Master. If I fall not I may yet best the ill-luck and conquer Millhaven for my own."

With that his mind leaped ahead again as the plan outlined itself to him. The O'Donnell pirates must have brought their whole force to the Dark Master's aid, and if he could but cut off that camp of theirs between the castle and the shore, Nuala O'Malley might bring her two ships against the weakened four and take them all.

Then, when the castle had fallen, he could sail north to Millhaven, reduce the stronghold there, and let fly his own banner at last. It was a good plan, but it hung on many things.

With a short laugh at his own fancies he turned in the saddle as the voice of Turlough broke into his musings.

"I mind the last time I saw the poor woman back yonder, master. It was just before the great flight, and I mind now that she was not so ill-looking even then, though she was well past her youth, and that was forty years ago. Tyr-connall's bag-pipe men were blowing as we marched to Lough Swilly, and two earls rode in front when the poor *caillin* rushed out and flung herself under Tyr-owen's horse—oh, *Mhuire as truagh, Muire as truagh* for the old days! And when the earl died, her

name was on his lips, and I came home again to find her disappeared. Oh, what sorrow for the old days! Would that I had died in Rome with the princes—"

"Stop that wailing," interrupted Brian sternly, for the old man was lashing himself into a frenzy of grief. "Put spurs to that horse of yours, Turlough, for we must reach Cathbarr's tower by noon if possible in order to start the men off over the hills. It 'll be a long night's march, and I've no time to be idling here on the road."

Upon which he dug in his spurs and urged his steed into a gallop, and in order to keep up, Turlough Wolf had to give over his laments and do likewise. Brian forced himself to bend all his energies toward carrying out his final desperate plan, but he silently vowed that the old woman who had so foully been cut down by the O'Donnells should not die unavenged.

On they galloped without pause, gained the head of Bertraghboy Bay, and swung to the east on the last stretch of the trip. The storm which had arisen so inopportunely was now dying away, and the sun was breaking through the gray clouds; when they turned out from the main track into the hill-paths that led to Cathbarr's tower, the rough ground made them slow their pace. When they were still three miles from the tower, however, Brian gave a shout.

"Men, Turlough! Cathbarr has sent out men to meet us!"

So, indeed, it proved, and five minutes later a dozen men met them with yells of delighted welcome. From these overjoyed fellows Brian quickly learned that Cathbarr was at the tower and that Nuala O'Malley had just arrived there.

So, leaving them to follow, he and Turlough went on at their best speed, and twenty minutes later they topped that same long rise from which Brian had first gazed down on the little promontory where stood Cathbarr's tower. But now, as he saw what lay beneath, he drew up with a shout of amazement.

For around the tower and at the base at the neck of land were camped a goodly force of men, while at anchor near the tower lay — not Nuala's two ships alone, but also those other two of her kinsmen!

"Those two O'Malleys have returned from the south," exclaimed Turlough in wild delight. "That means more men and ships, master—we will cut off those Millhaven pirates to a man!"

Brian sent out a long shout, but his arrival had already been noted. As he rode down the slope, men poured from the camp and tower, and ahead of them all came Cathbarr of the Ax, with Nuala and Lame Art and Shaun the Little behind him.

"Welcome!" bellowed the giant with a huge laugh, pulling Brian from his horse with a great hug of delight. "Welcome, brother!"

Brian escaped from his grip and bowed over the Bird Daughter's hand. As he rose, he saw that her face had lost its ruddy hue, and that her eyes were ringed with darkness. Before he could speak she smiled and gripped his hand.

"The birds came safe, and we know all. Yesterday arrived these kinsmen of mine, and their force is joined to our own, Yellow Brian—"

Brian held up his hand, halting her suddenly, and silence fell on the men who had crowded around. For a moment he gazed into her deep eyes, then flung up his head and his voice rang clear and stern in the stillness.

"Lady Nuala," he said quietly, "I promised you that when I slew the Dark Master I would tell you my name. Before another day has passed I shall have slain him; and now I tell you and your kinsmen that I renounce all fealty to you."

At this the Bird Daughter started, staring in amazement, while an abrupt oath burst from Lame Art. Brian went on calmly.

"This I do because it is not meet that The O'Neill should give fealty to any.

Lady Nuala. I am Brian O'Neill, of right The O'Neill and Earl of Tyr-owen, though these are empty titles. And this night you and I shall fall on Bertragh together, Bird Daughter, and when we have won it again it shall be yours as of old."

And amid a great roar of shouts welling up around him Brian bowed to Nuala.

"Then, Brian O'Neill," she said, quieting the tumult a little, "am I to understand that you wish to make pact with me, and to receive no reward?"

For a moment he gazed openly and frankly into her eyes, and under his look the red crept into her cheeks again; yet her own eyes did not flinch.

Brian laughed out.

"Yes, lady! It may be that I shall have a reward to ask of you, but that may not be until I have won back what I have lost for you."

"And what if the reward be too great?"

"Why, that shall be for you to say!" and Brian laughed again. "Is it agreed, Bird Daughter?"

For an instant he thought she meant to refuse, as she drew herself up and met his level eyes; the men around held their breaths, and the O'Malley chiefs glanced at each other in puzzled wonder. Then her quick laugh rippled out and she gave him her hand.

"Agreed, Brian—and I hope that you can shave that yellow beard of yours by to-morrow!"

And the great yell that went up from the men drowned all else in Brian's ears.

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## CHAPTER XX.

### THE STORM BURSTS.

"NOW, the first thing is to see what force of men we have," said Brian, after the midday meal. They were all gathered in Cathbarr's tower before a log fire, and were preparing the plan of campaign.

"I have my hundred and eighty men," said Nuala. "When that last pigeon came from you I set out at once. With the hundred men under Cathbarr, we have close to three hundred. You can take them all, for my kinsmen here have enough and to spare to handle my two ships as well as theirs."

"Good!" exclaimed Brian, as the two O'Malleys nodded. "I think that by striking at dawn we shall find most of the O'Donnells ashore or in the castle, and if you time your sailing to strike on their four ships at the same time we may easily take castle, camp, and ships at one blow."

"If all went as men planned we would not need to pray Heaven for aid," quoth Shaun the Little sententiously. Brian glanced at him.

"Eh? What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing," returned the wide-shouldered seaman with a shrug. "Except that there may be more to it than we think, Brian."

"The Dark Master will not suspect your return so suddenly," spoke up Nuala. "Pay no heed to Shaun, Brian—he was ever a croaker. When think you we had best start?"

"I am no seaman," laughed Brian. "Get there at dawn, that is all. I will send on my men at once, then; since we have only two horses, Cathbarr and I will ride after them later and catch them up. Will you take the men, Turlough, or bide here out of danger?"

"I think it will be safest with the Lady Nuala," hesitated the old man craftily.

"Little you know her, then," roared Lame Art, his cousin joining in the laugh.

So Turlough had decided, however, and he stuck to it. Brian then described closely how the four pirate ships lay in the bay under Bertragh, while Shaun went out to arrange the distribution of his men on Nuala's ships.

The arrangements having been perfected, Brian saw his three hundred men

troop off on their march over the hills, after which he told Nuala at greater length all that had taken place in the castle since his parting with her at sea. Bitter and unrestrained were the curses of the O'Malleys as they heard of how his men had been poisoned, while Nuala's eyes flamed forth anger.

"There shall be no quarter to these O'Donnells," she cried hotly. "Those whom we take shall hang, and the Scots with them—"

"Not the Scots," exclaimed Brian quickly. "They are honest men enough, Nuala, and may serve us well as recruits. If we find them in the castle, as I think we shall, we may leave them there until we have finished the Millhaven men; however, it is possible that my men will find the castle almost unguarded, and so take it at the first blow. However that turns out, the Dark Master shall not escape us this time."

During the afternoon, when the two O'Malleys were busily getting their ships in order for the coming fray, Brian sat in the tower with Nuala. He told her freely of himself, and although neither of them referred to that reward of which he had spoken at their meeting, Brian knew well that he would claim it.

He did not conceal from himself that the Black Woman had guided him to more than conquest by sword. The Bird Daughter was such a woman as he had dreamed of, but had never found at the Spanish court, and he knew that whether there was love in her heart or not, his own soul was in her keeping.

Perhaps he was not the only one who knew this, for as Lame Art rowed out with his cousin, the latter nodded back at the tower.

"What think you of this ally, Art Bocagh? Could he be truly the Earl's grandson?"

"I know not," grunted the other. "But I do not care whether he be Brian Buidh or Brian O'Neill or Brian the devil—he is such a man as I would fain see sitting in Gorumna Castle, Shaun!"

And Shaun the Little nodded with a grin.

When the sun began its westering, Brian and Cathbarr rode back from the tower with food and weapons at their saddle-bows, and they paused at the hill-crest to watch the four ships weigh anchor and up sail, then went on into the hills. They were to meet their men at that valley where the Dark Master had been defeated and broken in the first siege, and jogged along slowly, resting as they rode.

"Brother," said Cathbarr suddenly, fingering the haft of his ax and looking at Brian, "do you remember my telling you, that night after we had bearded the Dark Master and got the loan of those two-score men, how an old witch-woman had predicted my fate?"

"Yes," returned Brian, with a sharp glance. In the giant's face there was only a simple good-humor, however, mingled with a childlike confidence in all things. "And I told you that you were not bound to my service."

"No, but I am bound to your friendship," laughed Cathbarr rumblingly. "I can well understand how I might die in a cause not mine own, since I am fighting for you; but I cannot see how death is to come upon me through water and fire, brother!"

"Nonsense," smiled Brian. "Death is far from your heels, brother, unless you are seeking it."

"Not I, Brian. I neither seek nor avoid if the time comes. Only I wish that witch-woman had told me a little more—"

"Keep your mind off it, Cathbarr," said Brian. "In Spain the Moriscoes say that the fate of man is written on his forehead, and God is just."

"What the devil do I care about that?" bellowed Cathbarr. "I care not when I die, brother — but I want to strike a blow or two first, and how can that be done if death comes by water and fire?"

"Well, take heart," laughed Brian,

seeing the cause of the other's anxiety. "You are not like to die from that cause to-night, and I promise you blows enough and to spare."

Cathbarr grunted and said no more. The last of the storm had fled away, and the two men rode through a glittering sunset and a clear, cold evening that promised well for the morrow.

They traveled easily, and it was hard on midnight when a sentry stopped them half a mile from the hollow where the men were resting. Brian noted with approval that no fires had been lighted, and he and Cathbarr at once lay down to get an hour's sleep among the men.

Two hours before daybreak the camp was astir, and Brian gathered his lieutenants to arrange the attack. Thinking that the Dark Master would be in the castle, he and Cathbarr took a hundred men for that attack, ordering the rest to get as close to the camp as might be, but not to attack until he had struck on the castle, and to cut off the O'Donnells from their ships. Then, assured that the plan was understood, he and Cathbarr loaded their pistols and set out with the hundred.

Brian ordered his men to give quarter to all the Scots who would accept it, if they got inside the castle, and as they marched forward through the darkness he found to his delight that O'Donnell seemed to have no sentries out.

"We have caught the black fox this time," muttered Cathbarr, after they had passed the camp-fires without discovery and the black mass of the castle loomed up ahead. "They will hardly have repaired those gates by now, brother."

Brian nodded, and ordered his men to rest, barely a hundred paces from the castle. Since there was no need of attacking before dawn, in order to let Nuala come up the bay, he went forward with Cathbarr to look at the gates.

These, as nearly as he could tell, were still shattered in; there were fires in the courtyard, and sentries were on the wall, but their watch was lax and the two below were not discovered. They rejoined the hundred, and Brian bade Cathbarr follow him through the hall to that chamber he himself had occupied in the tower, where O'Donnell was most likely to be found.

"Well, no use of delaying further," he said, when at length the grayness of dawn began to dull the starlight. Since to light matches would have meant discovery, he had brought with him those hundred Kerry pikemen Nuala had recruited after the dark Master's defeat, and he passed on the word to follow.

The mass of men gained the moat before a challenge rang out from above, and with that Brian leaped forward at the gates. A musket roared out, and another, but Brian and Cathbarr were in the courtyard before the Scots awakened. A startled group barred their way to the hall, then Brian thrust once, the huge ax crashed down, and they were through.

Other men were sleeping in the hall, but Brian did not stop to battle here, running through before the half-awakened figures sensed what was forward. A great din of clashing steel and yells was rising from the court; then he and Cathbarr gained the seaward battlements and rushed at the Dark Master's chamber. The door was open—it was empty.

For a moment the two stared at each other in blank dismay. With a yell, a half-dozen Scots swirled down on them, but Brian threw up his hand.

"The castle is mine," he shouted. "You shall have quarter!"

The Scots halted, and when two or three of the Kerry pikemen dashed up with news that the rest of the garrison had been cut down or given quarter, they surrendered.

Brian's first question was as to O'Donnell.

"Either at the camp or aboard one of his kinsmen's ships," returned one of the prisoners. "They were carousing all last evening."

At the same instant Cathbarr caught Brian's arm and whirled him about.

"Listen, brother!"

So swift had been Brian's attack that the castle had been won in a scant three minutes. Now, as he listened, there came a ragged roar of musketry, pierced by yells, and he knew that the camp was attacked.

With that, a sudden fear came on him that he would again be outwitted. There was a thin mist driving in from the sea which would be dissipated with the daybreak, and if the Dark Master was on one of the ships he might get away before Nuala's caracks could arrive. Brian had been so certain that he would find O'Donnell in the castle that the disappointment was a bitter one, but he knew that there was no time to lose.

"Come," he ordered Cathbarr quickly, "get a score of the men and to the camp. Leave the others here to hold the castle if need be."

As he strode through the courtyard and the sullen groups of Scots prisoners, he directed the Kerry men to load the bastards on the walls and give what help might be in destroying the pirate ships. Then, with Cathbarr and twenty eager men at his back, he set off for the camp at a run, fearful that he might yet be too late.

The day was brightening fast, and from the camp rose a mighty din of shouts and steel and musketry. Brian's men had charged after one hasty volley, but their leader gave a groan of dismay as he saw that instead of attacking from the seaward side as he had ordered, they were pouring into the camp from the land side.

O'Donnell must have landed the greater part of his men, for Brian's force was being held in check, though they had swept in among the brush huts. Over the tumult Brian heard the piercing voice of the Dark Master, and with a flame of rage hot in his mind he sped forward and found himself confronted by a yelling mass of O'Donnells.

Then fell a sterner battle than any Brian had waged. In the lessening obscurity it was hard to tell friend from foe, since the mist was swirling in off the water and holding down the powder-smoke. Brian saved his pistols, and, with Cathbarr at his side, struck into the wild, shaggy-haired northern men; they were armed with ax and sword and skean, and Brian soon found himself hard beset despite the pikemen behind.

The Spanish blade licked in and out like a tongue of steel, and Brian's skill stood him in good stead that morn. Ax and broadsword crashed at him, and as he wore no armor save a steel cap, he more than once gave himself up for lost. But ever his thin, five-foot steel drove home to the mark, and ever Cathbarr's great ax hammered and clove at his side, so that the fight surged back and forth among the huts, as it was surging on the other side where was the Dark Master, holding off the main attack.

Little by little the mist eddied away, however, and the day began to break. A fresh surge of the wild O'Donnells bore down on Brian's party, and as they did so a man rose up from among the wounded and stabbed at Brian with his skean. Brian kicked the arm aside, but slipped in blood and snow and went down; as a yell shrilled up from the pirates, Cathbarr leaped forward over him, swinging his ax mightily. With the blunt end he caught one man full in the face, then drove down his sharp edge and clove another head to waist. For an instant he was unable to get out his ax, but Brian thrust up and drove death to a third, then stood on his feet again.

At the same instant there came a roar from across the camp where his main body of men were engaged, and Brian thrilled to the sound. As he afterward found, it was done by Turlough's cunning word; but up over the din of battle rose the great shout that struck dismay to the pirates and heartened Brian himself tc new efforts.

"Tyr-owen! Tyr-owen!"

With a bellow of "Tyr-owen!" Cath-

barr went at the foe, and Brian joined him with his own battle-cry on his lips for the first time in his life. The shout swelled louder and louder, and among the huts Brian got a glimpse of the Dark Master. In vain he tried to break through the Millhaven men, however; they stood like a wall, dying as they fought, but giving no ground until the ax and the sword had cloven a way, although the remnant of the twenty pikemen were fighting like fiends.

Suddenly a yell of dismay went up from the O'Donnell ranks, and they broke in wild confusion. Leaning on his sword and panting for breath, Brian looked around and saw what had shattered them so swiftly.

While the stubborn fight had raged, the eastern sky had been streaming and bursting into flame. Now, sharply outlined against the crimson water, appeared Nuala's four ships close on those of the pirates. Even as he looked, Brian saw their cannon spit out white smoke, while from behind came a deeper thunder as the castle's guns sent their heavy balls over the pirate ships.

These were anchored a hundred yards from shore, and Brian saw the danger that betided as the stream of fugitives swept down toward the boats. Nuala's ships were undermanned, for he had counted on cutting off most of the pirates in the camp; should the Dark Master get to the ships with his men, things were like to go hard.

"To the boats!" cried Brian to Cathbarr, and leaping over the dead, the two joined their men and poured down on the shore.

The Dark Master himself stood by one of the boats, and others were filling fast with men as they were shoved down. Brian tried to cut his way to O'Donnell, but before he could do so the Dark Master had leaped aboard and oars were out. Fully aware of their danger, those of the pirates who could do so got into their boats and lay off the shore, while others splashed aboard; Brian led his men down with a rush, cutting down man after man, splashing out into the swirling water and hacking at those in the boats, but all in vain. Some half-dozen of the boats got off, crowded with men, while the remnant of the pirates held off Brian's force that their master might escape.

Drawing out of the fight, Brian pulled forth his pistols and emptied them both at the figure of O'Donnell. He saw the Dark Master reel, and the rower next him plunged forward over the bows, but the next moment O'Donnell had taken up the oar himself and was at work in mad haste. Brian groaned and flung away his pistols.

Those aboard the pirate ships had already cut the cables and were striving to make sail, for there was a light off-shore breeze in their favor, with an ebbing tide. The O'Malley ships were close on them, however, and as the cannon crashed out anew the masts of one O'Donnell ship crashed over. But the Dark Master's boat was alongside another of the ships, whose sails were streaming up, and now his cannon began to answer those of Nuala.

But Brian stood in bitterness, unmindful of the wild yells of his men, for once more the Dark Master had escaped his hand at the last moment. Shaun the Little had been correct in his "croakings."

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### CATHBARR YIELDS UP HIS AX.

BRIAN gazed out at the scene before him in dull despair. So close were the ships that he could clearly make out Nuala's figure, with its shimmering mail and red cloak, on the poop of the foremost.

Her second carack had fallen behind, a shot having sent its foremast overside, but the other two ships were driving in. All three were lowering sail, for the Dark Master's craft were unable to get out of the bay and were giving over the attempt; his disabled ship was sending over

its men to reinforce him, and Brian saw all his own efforts gone for nothing.

There came a new burst of cannon, and through the veil of smoke he perceived that Nuala was laying her carack alongside one of the pirate ships. But it was not that on which stood the Dark Master; his was the ship closest to the castle, and Lame Art was bearing down on him, while Shaun the Little stood for the third, spitting out a final broadside as he came about and lowered sail.

The crowding men on the shore had fallen silent as they watched the impending conflict, but now Brian felt Cathbarr touch his arm, and turned.

"Why so doleful, brother?" grinned the giant; though blood dripped into his beard from a light slash over the brow, his eyes were as clear and childlike as ever, and the rage of battle had gone from him. "Let us join in that fight, you and I?"

"Eh?" Brian started, staring at him. "How may that be?"

"Ho, here is our captain given way to despair!" bellowed Cathbarr, and his fist smote down on Brian's back. "Wake up, brother! We have three boats here, and we can still strike a blow or two!"

Now Brian wakened to life indeed. He saw the three boats on the shore, with dead men hanging over them, and leaped instantly into action.

"Push out those boats—get the oars, there!" he shouted, leaping down to help shove them out. The men saw his intent, and sprang to work with a howl of delight.

In no long time the dead were flung out, and the boats pushed down until they were afloat. Brian leaped into one, Cathbarr into another, and men piled in after them until the craft were almost awash.

An eddy in the veil of smoke that hung over the bay showed Brian that Lame Art's ship had grappled with that of O'Donnell, and with renewed confidence thrilling in him, he shouted to his men to get aboard the O'Malley ship. The Bertragh cannon had ceased to thunder as the ships came together, but from the ships balls were hailing, musketry was crackling, and the water was tearing into spurting jets around the boats.

Brian's men fell to their oars in sorry fashion enough, but they made up in energy what they lacked in skill. Driving past Nuala's ship, Brian saw that she had also grappled and that the battle was raging over her bulwarks, but sorely tempted to turn aside though he was, he waved his men on.

They rowed close under the ship to which she was fastened, and as they sped past the O'Donnells saw them, and gave them a scattering volley. One or two of Brian's men went down, and a cry broke from him as he saw a round shot heaved over into his third boat, sinking her; then they were past, and bearing down on Art Bocagh's ship.

"Tyr-owen for O'Malley!"

Cathbarr's bellow rose over the tumult, and his boat crashed into the waist of the ship just as Brian leaped up into the mizzen-chains. His feet gained hold on a triced-up port, and as he looked down he saw a swell heave up the two boats, then bring them down together with a splintering smash.

The result was dire confusion. None of the men were seamen, but some of them gained the side of Brian, others scrambled in through the ports, and more than one of them fell short and went down. Standing in the sinking boat with the water swirling about his ankles, Cathbarr caught up his ax and leaped; a moment later Brian was over the bulwarks with the giant at his side, and the O'Malleys welcomed them with a yell of joy.

They were badly needed, indeed. The Dark Master had led his men in furious onslaught across the waist of the ship, and Art Bocagh was being beaten back to the poop despite his stubborn resistance. Brian saw that the Dark Master's men far outnumbered Art's, while from the rigging of each ship musketeers were sending down bullets into the mêlée. With

a shout, Brian and Cathbarr led their men on the O'Donnell flank, and the tide of battle turned.

At the first instant the rush of men bore Brian against the Dark Master, who was fighting like a demon. Brian caught the snarl on the other's pallid face, and struck savagely; O'Donnell parried the blow with his skean and returned it, but Brian warded with his left arm and swept down his blade. The Dark Master flung himself back, but not far enough, and Brian saw the point rip open the pallid cheek. Even as he pressed his advantage, however, another surge of men separated them.

Now Brian gave over every thought save that of reaching his enemy again, and fell on the O'Donnells with stark madness in his face. A pistol roared into his stubbly beard and the ball carried off his steel cap, but he cut down the man and pressed into the midst of the pirates, cutting and thrusting in terrible rage.

At sight of him men bore back; the icy flame in his eyes took the heart from those who faced him, and behind rose Cathbarr's wild bellows as the giant hewed through after Brian. Back went the pirates, and farther back. Brian found that he had cut his way to Lame Art, and with a yell the forces joined and swept on the Dark Master's men.

O'Donnell had vanished, and now his men were swept back to the bulwarks and over to their own deck. Here they made a brief stand; then Cathbarr leaped over into the midst and his ax crushed down two men at once; Brian followed him, and for an instant it seemed that they would sweep all before them.

Just then, however, Lame Art toppled from the bulwarks with a bullet through him from above, and the Dark Master's disappearance was explained by a rain of grenades that whirled among the O'Malleys. They gave back in dismay, Brian and Cathbarr were forced after them, and the Dark Master himself led his men in a mad stream over the bulwarks once more.

There was no stopping them now. The death of Art Bocagh had disheartened his men, and amid flashing steel and spurting fire Brian and Cathbarr retreated to the quarterdeck. Here they had a brief breathing space until the pirates came at them anew, and with such fury that three of them gained a footing to one side. Brian went at them with a shout, thrust one man through the body, sent a second back with his bare fist, and as the third man struck down at him a pikeman transfixed the man before the blow could fall.

The boarders drew back, but as they did so a great heave of the grinding ships broke the hastily flung grapplings. The ships were borne apart, and the Dark Master with most of his men remained in the waist of the O'Malley ship.

This gave a new turn to the conflict. O'Donnell had to master the ship to win free, and when Brian saw this he gave a great laugh and rejoined Cathbarr. A quick glance around showed him that Nuala was slowly winning her grappled decks, while Shaun the Little was hanging off and sending his cannon crashing into the third pirate ship. The two disabled craft were slowly drawing together with the tide, which was forcing all eight into the bay, and were pounding away with their guns as they came.

Now the combat resolved itself into a desperate struggle for possession of the quarterdeck, which Brian and Cathbarr held. The Dark Master's men swarmed up at them bravely enough, but the ax and sword flashed up and down, and time after time the Millhaven men fell back, unable to win a footing. Twice the Dark Master himself led them, snarling with baffled rage, but the first time a pikeman thrust him down and the second time Cathbarr's ax glanced from his helm.

O'Donnell reeled back and was lost to sight for a time.

"That was a poor blow," grunted the giant in disgust. "'Ware, brother! Stand aside!"

Brian leaped away as the men behind him ran out a falcon and sent its blast

into the crowd below in the waist. A dozen men went down under that storm of death, but almost at the same moment a grenade burst behind the falcon, and with that Brian was driven back as a keg of powder tore out half the quarterdeck in a bursting wall of flame and smoke.

Barely had the shattering roar died out when Brian's reeling senses caught a wild yell of dismay from his men.

"Fire! The ship is afire forward!"

Brian saw that the grenades had indeed fired the ship forward, while the explosion had sent the quarterdeck into a burst of fire also, and the lowered but unfurled sails were roaring up in flame.

Up poured the O'Malleys, and Brian staggered back to the poop. He had a vision of the great form of Cathbarr heaving up through the smoke, blackened and bleeding, but with the ax whirling like a leaf and smiting down men; then Brian gained the poop, helped the giant up, and with the few men left they turned to drive down the pirates, who were striving desperately to win the ship before it was too late.

As he stood with Cathbarr at the narrow break of the poop, beating down man after man, Brian knew that it was only a question of time now, for the whole ship was breaking into flame forward. Suddenly he felt a tug at his buff coat, and looked down to see his belt fall away, sundered at his side by a bullet. He thought little of it, for he had half a dozen slight wounds, and turned to smite down at a man who had leaped for the poop; as his sword sheared through helm and skull, there came another tug, and Brian felt a bullet scrape along his ribs.

The O'Donnells drew back momentarily, and in the brief pause Brian saw the figure of the Dark Master by the starboard rail in the waist, aiming up at him with a pistol, while two men behind him were hastily charging others. Cathbarr saw the action also, and hastily flung Brian aside, but too late. A burst of smoke flooded over the waist, and Brian caught the pistol-flash through it, as the ball ripped his left arm from shoulder to elbow. Then the pirates were at the poop again, and the waist was shut out by the flooding smoke as the wind drove it down from forward.

With a scant dozen men behind them, Brian and Cathbarr once more beat the enemy back; the giant swung his ax less lightly now, and seemed to be covered with wounds, though most of them were slight. Brian still eyed the waist for another glimpse of the Dark Master, but the smoke was thick and he could see nothing. In the lull he flung a wan smile at Cathbarr, who stood leaning on his ax, his mail-shirt shredded and bloody.

"Are you getting your fill of battle, brother?"

"Aye," grinned the giant, "and we had best swim for it in another minute or the ship—look! *M'anam an diaoul!* Look!"

At his excited yell Brian turned, as a ball whistled between them. There below, in a boat half full of dead, but with two men at the oars, stood the Dark Master, just lowering his pistol. He flung the empty weapon up at Brian with a hoarse yell of anger, and passed from sight beneath the ship's counter, toward the stern.

Realizing only that his enemy was escaping, Brian whirled and darted for the poop-cabins. He was dimly conscious of a mass of figures behind, amid whom stood Cathbarr with the ax heaving up and down, then he was in the cabins. Jerking open the door to the stern-walk, he saw the Dark Master's boat directly underneath, hardly six feet from him.

"Tyr-owen!" yelled Brian, and dropping his sword, but holding his skean firmly, he hurdled the stern-walk railing and leaped.

At that wild shout the Dark Master looked up, but he was too late. Brian hurtled down, his body striking O'Donnell full in the chest and driving him over on top of the two rowers, so that all four men sprawled out over the dead. For

an instant the shock drove the breath out of Brian, then he felt a hand close on his throat, and struck out with his skean.

One of the rowers gurgled and fell back, and Brian rolled over just as steel sank into his side. Giddy and still breathless, he gained his knees to find the Dark Master thrusting at him from the stern, while at his side the other rower was rising. Brian brought up his fist, caught the man full on the chin, and drove him backward over the gunwale. The lurch of the boat flung the Dark Master forward, Brian felt a sickening wrench of pain as the sword pierced his shoulder and tore loose from O'Donnell's hand, then he had clutched his enemy's throat, and his skean went home.

Spent though both men were, the sting of the steel woke the Dark Master to a burst of energy. As the two fell over the thwarts, he twisted above and bore Brian down and tried to break the grip on his throat, but could not. For the second time in his life Brian felt that he had a wild animal in his grasp; the sight of the snarling face, the venomous black eyes, and the consciousness that his own strength was slowly ebbing, all roused him to a last great effort.

The smoke-pall had shut out everything but that wolfish face, and as he writhed up even that seemed to dim and blur before his eyes, so that in desperate fear he struck out again and again, blindly. The blows fell harmless enough, for all his strength was going into that right hand of his; he did not know that his fingers were crushing out the Dark Master's life, that O'Donnell's face was purple and his hands feebly beating the air.

Brian knew only that the terrible face was hidden from him by some loss of vision, some horrible failure of sight due to his weakness. Suddenly there was a great crash at his side, and he thought that a huge ax with iron twisted around its haft had fallen from the sky and sheared away half the gunnel of the boat. He struck out again with his skean, and felt the blow go home—and with that there came a terrific, blinding roar. The smoke-veil was rent apart by a sheet of flame, Brian realized that the burning ship must have blown up, and then a blast of hot wind drove down against him and smote his senses from him.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE STORM OF MEN COMES TO REST.

"VERY well, Turlough. Tell Captain Peyton that I will give him an answer to his message tonight, then bid my kinsman Shaun entertain him in the hall, with the other officers. Send some food up here, and I may come down later."

"And, mistress—you will tell me if—"

"Surely. Now go."

Brian tried to open his eyes, but could not. He tried to move, but could not; and realized at length that he was lying on a bed, and that a bandage was on his head and others on his limbs.

Suddenly a hand fell on his cheek, and a thrill shot through him; his beard had been shaved away, for he could feel the softness of the hand against his chin. He felt the hand passed over his mouth—and he kissed it.

There was a startled gasp, then the soft hand returned to his cheek.

"Brian! Are you awake at last?"

"I seem to be," he said, though his voice sounded more like a whisper. "Is that you, Nuala? Where are we?"

"Yes, it is I," came her voice softly, and something warm splashed on his cheek. "Oh, Brian! I so feared that—that you were dead!"

The hand moved away, and he moved uneasily, to feel pain through his body.

"Nay, put back your hand!" he said. He tried to smile. "There, that's better. Where are we, Nuala? On your ship?"

"No, Brian—at Gorumna. But I forgot. Turlough said you must not talk—"

"Oh, curse Turlough" he cried in irritation. "Gorumna? What has happened? Where is the Dark Master?"

"Lie still or I must leave you!" she cried sharply, and he obeyed. "The Dark Master's head is over the gate, Brian. It is two days since the fight."

"Take that bandage from my eyes, Nuala," he said. After a minute her hands went to his head, and as he felt the bandage removed, light dazzled him, and he shut his eyes with a groan. Then he opened them again, and gradually he made out the figure of Nuala leaning over him, while a cresset shed light from above.

"Tell me what has happened," said Brian quietly, as he tried again to move and failed. "Why am I helpless here?"

"Because you are wounded," she replied softly. "Please lie quiet, Brian! I will tell you all that has chanced."

"Where is Cathbarr! Did we win?"

"Yes, we won; but—but Cathbarr—he must have flung away his ax before the ship exploded, for we found it sticking in your boat, and—"

Her voice broke, and a pang of bitterness shot through Brian as he remembered it all now. He groaned.

"And I left him there to die! Oh, coward that I am—coward, and false to my friend—"

A great sob shook his body, but Nuala's hands fell on his face, and there was fear in her voice when she answered him.

"No, Brian—don't say that! If any one's fault, it was Shaun's for not coming sooner to your aid. Cathbarr died as he would have wished, and indeed as he always thought he would die. But now listen, Brian, for I have news."

So, leaning over him, she swiftly told him of what had passed. The O'Donnells had been defeated and slain to the last man; one of their ships was sunk, and the other three captured, and her men held Bertragh. As she and Shaun O'Malley lay refitting and gathering their wounded that same afternoon, a Parliament ship had come in from the south, bearing an answer to the appeal she had sent to Blake at the Cove of Cork.

He had not only sent her powder and supplies, but had sent her a blank commission from Cromwell, which would be filled in upon her definite allegiance to the Commonwealth. The commission guaranteed her possession of Gorumna and Bertragh and the lands she claimed, and promised that when the royalists were driven from Galway the grant would be confirmed by Parliament.

"I am to answer Captain Peyton tonight, Brian," she finished, her eyes dancing. "And Shaun is going to remain and hold Bertragh for me—"

"What's that?" cried Brian. "Hold Bertragh? Am I then wounded so sore that I cannot draw sword again?"

"No," and her laugh rippled out. "Turlough says that you will be as well as ever in a month, Brian. But since you withdrew your fealty to me, I had to find another servant!"

"I had forgotten that," answered Brian moodily. He stared up at her face, and as he met her eyes saw the color flow up to her temples.

"You have slain the Dark Master as you promised, Brian," she said quietly. "And have you forgotten also that you meant to claim a reward from me for that deed?"

Brian laughed, and his face softened as happiness laid hold upon his heart.

"I have not forgotten that, Nuala; but now I am not going to ask that reward in the same way I had intended."

"How do you mean, Brian?" she asked gravely, though her eyes widened a trifle as if in quick fear.

"This, dear lady," he smiled. "When you answer Captain Peyton, let the commission be made out in the name of Nuala O'Neill—and take my fealty for what is left to me of life, Nuala."

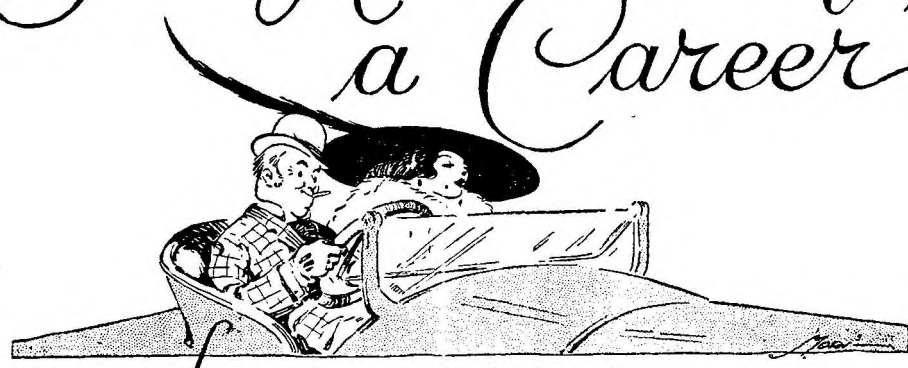
He looked up steadily, knowing that all things hung on that instant.

"Well, to tell the truth, Brian," and for a moment she seemed to hesitate, so that Brian felt a sudden shock, "I—I delayed answering him in—in that hope!"

And her face came down to his.

**(The end.)**

# The Husband of "a Career"



by Roy K. Moulton

OUR snappy suburban village of Avondale, forty-odd minutes from Broadway, was believed to be too blasé to register more than mild surprise over anything that might happen. The community was an improved shock-absorber. It had been scandalized by experts.

But when Theophilus Priddy, president of the T. Priddy Glue Company, drove up to his handsome Dutch colonial residence one memorable afternoon in a yellow roadster with red wheels, Avondale lost its mental poise. When he drove up the next afternoon accompanied by a handsome young woman with a green parasol, Mrs. Grundy fairly tore her hair and shrieked.

Then when came the incidents of the blue-satin slipper, the two city detectives, and the celebrated French manager, M. Jules Calabashe, with his warrant for Mr. Priddy's arrest, Avondale gave itself up to a season of unprecedented hysteria!

Up to the period embracing the events just mentioned, Priddy had been known to our local smart set as a man with a misanthropic grouch. He had created a wide social chasm between himself and the rest of us by refusing to acquire a golf score or an automobile. To emphasize his lack of the spirit of progress, it is only necessary to state that Priddy was the only man in the neighborhood who clung tenaciously to the old-fashioned habit of wearing suspenders.

We had no common topic of conversation with him. He was a being isolated from his fellow commuters. He did not worry about the price of gasoline. He was interested in that substance merely as a fluid in which neckties could be cleaned. Occasionally he bought a pint of it and cleaned his neckties himself.

That is the kind of a shell-fish T. Priddy was.

For years Theophilus had taken the 8.05 to business every morning, had spent the day in an office somewhere down Fulton Street way, and had returned home on the 5.08 with his nose buried in his favorite evening paper. Those who had hazarded conversation with him had given him the reputation of being of a highly sarcastic turn. Neighbors knew vaguely that he was interested in glue, and that

he attended, regularly, our suburban Presbyterian church.

He cut no more of a figure in the community than does an unexpected event which forgets to happen. When mentioned at all, he was mentioned as Mrs. Priddy's husband.

The cause of Priddy's total eclipse was the fact that he was married to a "career," and had been married to it for ten long years. In point of fact he was, of course, married to Mrs. Agatha Trowbridge Priddy, but Mrs. Priddy and her career were so inseparable that to speak of one was to speak of the other.

Previous to the lady's marriage to Mr. Priddy, there seemed to be all the reasons in the world why she should take that step. But a year afterward she could not recall more than one or two of them, and they were so inconsequential that they seemed almost absurd.

Mrs. Priddy had decided early in her matrimonial experience that glue was a liability rather than an asset to one with social aspirations. So she set Theophilus and his glue business away to the rear of the stage, behind the back drop, and started out to make a career for herself.

Women seeking careers generally play true to form, and Mrs. Priddy was no exception. She started with china painting, which is the lowest rung of the ladder, and thereafter played every bet on the card. As a matter of course she abandoned china painting almost immediately and took up music and foreign languages.

All the careers in that direction seemed to have been captured, and she became a dramatist. She wrote several problem plays for Belasco without the latter's advice or consent. These plays were designed to solve several well-known perplexities which infest modern social life. It is perhaps unnecessary to add that the problems remained unsolved. She could not even solve the problem of obtaining an interview with the immortal and temperamental David.

After being misunderstood as a dramatist for three years, Mrs. Priddy devoted her time to the writing of heavy magazine articles. Her more ambitious works were: "Maeterlinck's Influence Upon Modern Drama," "Efficiency Tests and their Influence Upon Farmers' Wives," and "The Sinister Influence of Life as Lived by the Idle Rich."

The magazine editors at that time had all been busy looking for snappy detective stories, and the "Influence" obtained publicity only by being read to the Avondale Woman's Club.

A career is elusive. When you think you have captured it, you find yourself grasping thin air while the career is perched over on the next mountain crag chirruping defiantly.

But Mrs. Priddy finally had caught up with her career, and with her firm, white hands had choked it into complete submission. She had become the official impresario for the Avondale Woman's Club, the Avondale Mental Uplift Society, the Avondale Civic Improvement Association, and the Avondale Psychological Forward Movement. It was she who secured the outside talent for the lectures, and it was the plebeian Mr. Priddy, with his nose immersed in glue, as it were, who paid for same.

When Theophilus went home in the evening he never knew whether he was to dine with Professor Ignatius Pringle, the eminent authority on "Bird Life in Bolivia," or with Dr. Erasmus Todd, the celebrated lecturer on "The Replenishment of the Species." In fact, he had dined with every known sort of public entertainer excepting a snake-charmer and a hand-cuff king.

There had been composers, singers, mural painters, esthetic dancers, poets, miniature artists, architects, war correspondents, and social welfare workers, but the table talk had never interested Mr. Priddy. Most of it had gone over his head and had been patently above his humble station in life.

Anyhow, his mind had always been upon other things. He was generally thinking of the glue business and wonder-

ing how long it would be able to hold out as pitted against the career.

II.

THEN came the evening of the mighty resolve when things began to happen that completely changed the *modus operandi* which had previously governed the life of Priddy.

Professor Jerome Terwilliger, the renowned authority on music among the peasants of Herzegovina, was the dinner guest, and was to deliver his lecture that evening in the club house.

It had not been customary for Mrs. Priddy to direct any considerable portion of her conversation toward her spouse. She knew by bitter experience that even the lowly earthworm has upon occasion the power to reveal umbrage. Mr. Priddy's replies were apt to be tinted with a mild satire or *double entendre* which did not ordinarily make for the comfort of the guest of honor. But, upon the conclusion of this dinner it became necessary for her to address him in the semi-abstract.

"It is a great pity, professor," said Mrs. Priddy, "that we cannot all hear your lecture this evening. Dear Theophilus, for instance, must stop at home and deny himself this tremendous privilege."

"Quite so, my dear Mrs. Priddy," agreed the celebrity. "It is, indeed, a great pity that any one should be forced to miss the lecture."

"Why is it a great pity?" demanded Mr. Priddy. "Er — ah — I mean, why must I stop at home?" coughing mildly behind his hand to conceal something, whether regret or satisfaction Mrs. Priddy could not determine.

"You will not be able to attend," she replied icily, "for the reason that Professor Terwilliger's baggage was mislaid by some careless checking person at Grand Central, and the professor will have to wear your evening clothes."

The alert if unemancipated mind of Theophilus galloped back to several dress shirts he had lost in the interest of the career, and he remembered vividly a pair of new patent leather shoes which had disappeared with Dr. Aurelius Tibbitts, the noted authority on Senegambian folk lore, not more than six months agone. It seemed that something was always happening to the luggage of these celebrities, and Theophilus had entirely lost count of the number of collars and ties that had been sacrificed to the higher arts.

He remembered having been obliged to walk several celebrities around several suburban blocks for the purpose of reducing the potency of the jags which they had brought with them from the great city, and his small soul burned with a resentment quite out of proportion to the rights of one in his submerged position in life.

Theophilus had not come home in time to dress for dinner that night, and he now noticed for the first time that his own dress-suit was already adorning the person of the gentleman who understood the music of the peasants of Herzegovina.

"I hope that my dress-shirt is the right size around the neck," he ventured cheerfully. "It must be tantalizing to a lecturer to be wearing a strange shirt which is too tight about the thorax. Don't you often find it so, professor?"

The professor was not allowed a moment's embarrassment. With a glance which would have killed any one but the husband of a career, Mrs. Priddy gave the signal to rise from table.

When Professor Terwilliger and Mrs. Priddy had returned from the lecture and the professor had retired to the guest chamber for the night, his hostess went immediately to the library to interview Mr. Priddy.

Mr. Priddy was not in the library. He was not in his room. He was nowhere in the house.

The butler informed the now thoroughly alarmed impresario that her husband had left word that he had gone to the city on very important business.

It was the first time in ten years that such a thing had happened. Mrs. Priddy was fairly stupefied, but retained enough of her usual mental efficiency to enter upon a determination to sit up for the tardy one and greet him as he entered the front door. She waited until 1.30, when she went to sleep in the armchair.

At precisely two o'clock a taxicab delivered Mr. Priddy. He walked quietly and steadily to a side door, let himself in with a night key, and went up-stairs to bed.

There was no opportunity for intimate conversation upon family subjects during the breakfast hour. The professor was there, and he was in a dour mood, which was probably a hang-over from his intellectual souse of the evening before. Mrs. Priddy was half-asleep and strangely silent. Theophilus was chipper and extremely animated, but the breakfast was not a success from any point of view.

Theophilus and the professor took the same train to town, but not the same coach.

III.

THEN came the memorable afternoon when T. Priddy drove up to his own house in the yellow automobile with red wheels, the afternoon upon which Avondale first noticed that the germ of regeneration had bitten the glue manufacturer in a vital spot.

It was not the same Priddy by any means. The somber clothing had been removed. The moth had become the butterfly. Theophilus wore a light-gray suit with black binding. A gray derby hat sat rakishly over one ear, and upon the chest of Priddy there reposed an Italian sunset tie of brilliant red. In the tie there rested a gallant diamond horseshoe.

Theophilus brought his car to a stop with a flourish and tripped lightly to the house where waited the helpmeet who for sixteen hours had nursed a great and consuming wrath.

But if Avondale was shocked by the appearance of Priddy, the earthworm, in the habit of a vaudeville artist, Mrs. Priddy was more than shocked. She was paralyzed. Her carefully rehearsed words of welcome died upon her lips and she leaned weakly against the newel post and panted.

"Well!" she finally stammered, "w-w-what's the m-m-meaning of the disguise?"

"The meaning is," replied Theophilus, "that *I* am going to have a career. My way has been too prosaic. I am going to cut into the joys of life. Do you get me, m'dear?"

"You had better stick to the glue business," replied the astounded Mrs. Priddy sharply.

"A very pretty pun, Mrs. Priddy. A very pretty pun indeed. 'Stick to the glue business.' That's immense! Your repartee seems to be improving," and Theophilus drew from his pocket a handsome gold cigarette-case, selected a cigarette with considerable care and lighted it.

"Cigarettes!" almost screamed Mrs. Priddy. "The man is going crazy!"

"Not at all, m'dear," replied Theophilus calmly. "I don't really like the durned things, you know, but they are a part of my career. I am not going to be a back-number any longer. Now, if you are ready, we'll go for a ride around town in the new car."

"Not on your life," snapped Mrs. Priddy, sinking into the vernacular in the stress of her excitement. "*You* may do what you like, but I am not going to make a side-show of myself!"

"Very well," replied Theophilus, "then I will go alone. I will be back in time for dinner."

Mrs. Priddy did not hear her husband's last remark, for she had slammed the vestibule door and hurried up-stairs to the quietude of her boudoir to fight this new condition out with herself.

After a charming drive through our astonished suburb, Mr. Priddy reached home and was rather reluctantly introduced to Rev. T. Nugent Hicks, the celebrated authority on "The Progress of

Psychology Among the Natives of Zanzibar."

The celebrity was too well-bred to show any particular emotion over Mr. Priddy's vaudeville costume. Everything seemed to be running smoothly enough, but the hostess was plainly not at her best. Her mind seemed to be preoccupied, and indeed it was. For the first time in ten years she was thinking of something beside her career.

The salad arrived, and at this juncture Mr. Priddy took occasion to pull from his inner coat-pocket a large silk handkerchief with a vivid lavender border.

Lavender had always been Mrs. Priddy's pet aversion, but it was not the color of the border which caused that lady's eyes to pop almost out of her head. The cause of this unprecedented display of feeling was the fact that when Theophilus pulled the handkerchief out of his pocket there came also a very small and very dainty blue satin slipper with a flashing diamond buckle.

The slipper rolled across the table and rested saucily against the salad plate of Rev. T. Nugent Hicks. Mr. Hicks looked at the slipper. Then he glanced at Mrs. Priddy, and he knew that the slipper did not belong to her.

Even a man of Mr. Hicks's profession could arrive at that conclusion without the slightest difficulty.

There was no particular excitement. Watkins removed the slipper and carried it into the butler's pantry. He was as unperturbed as though he had been waiting for the slipper to roll out of his master's pocket.

Mr. Priddy blushed becomingly. Mr. Hicks began talking of the habits of the natives of Zanzibar, and the hostess confined her attention to her salad.

Within a few moments Mr. Priddy was called to the telephone. He came back almost immediately and excused himself, stating that important business called him to the city. Apologizing to Rev. Mr. Hicks, and stating that he would see that gentleman at breakfast, Theophilus hurried out to his car and chugged away cityward.

The lecture didn't make a very profound impression upon the impresario. At its conclusion, in fact, she could not have told one word that she had heard. Her mind was in the city with Theophilus, and she even managed to think of his struggle in the glue business without a shudder.

A totally new line of thought was developing. The lady could not deceive herself. She was thoroughly alarmed. Priddy, present in the flesh, was not an object to inspire much serious consideration; but Priddy absent in the city at night loomed so large that the aspect of the situation grew to be almost terrifying.

Mrs. Priddy's sense of pride kept her from waiting up for the tardy one that night, but she heard him when he drove up in his yellow car shortly after twelve.

## IV.

BREAKFAST, with Rev. Mr. Hicks present, was a solemn meal. Theophilus, in his gladdest raiment, brought his car around to the front of the house and invited the celebrity to ride to town with him.

Determined to ascertain what she could concerning the mysterious telephone call of the evening before, Mrs. Priddy summoned the maid who had answered the ring.

"Do you happen to know who called Mr. Priddy on the phone last evening?" asked Mrs. Priddy carelessly.

"No, I don't, ma'am; but it sounded like a good-looking voice," Marie replied.

"Masculine, of course," ventured Mrs. Priddy.

"No, indeed. Feminine, and a very sweet—"

"That will do, Marie," said Mrs. Priddy coldly; "you may go."

The situation called for instant action. The "career" dropped suddenly away behind the horizon of Mrs. Priddy's mental vision. She immediately called her

husband's office on the telephone, and told Theophilus that she had canceled the invitation she had extended to Dr. Elias Tucker, of Hokum College, for dinner that evening. She desired to see Mr. Priddy alone at dinner. There were certain things which must be ironed out.

"I am very glad the doctor is not going to be with us to-night, Agatha," said Mr. Priddy, "for I am bringing home to dinner a very celebrated person. She is Mlle. Sophie Zabrowski, of the Imperial Russian Ballet, who will dance this evening before a gathering of the members of the Avondale Knife and Fork Club. Expect us about four o'clock."

Mrs. Priddy heard her husband's receiver slam into its holder. She had no time to faint or do anything strictly feminine, for at that very moment Marie entered to tell her that two strange gentlemen were waiting to see her.

Mrs. Priddy found two very earnest gentlemen in the drawing-room. Their eyes seemed to be constantly roaming about, seeking to penetrate every nook and corner in the place. Both of them wore severe mustaches, and Mrs. Priddy knew that they were from the police.

"Mrs. Priddy, I presume," said the taller of the two gentlemen gruffly, yet with a certain tone of politeness.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Priddy," she replied.

"We are on an unpleasant errand," said the detective. "We are looking for a slipper bearing a very valuable diamond buckle."

"Yes?" gasped Mrs. Priddy faintly.

"The buckle is the property of Mlle. Réné Perigot, the well-known French dancer, both the slipper and buckle having been presented to her by the Crown Prince of Moravinia."

"Very interesting, indeed," interrupted Mrs. Priddy, whose well-known courage was slowly rising to the occasion. "But why relate the tale to me?"

"For this reason, madam. Mlle. Réné dined the night before last with a flashily dressed gentleman. As is her custom, she kicked off both slippers when she sat down at the table. Her escort suddenly remembered an important telephone engagement, and left her to go to the booth. When he disappeared, one of her slippers disappeared with him. He was seen to jump into a yellow roadster with red wheels. The roadster has been traced to this suburb; in fact, to this very house. There could be no mistake. There is not another roadster like it in New York."

"Was it a blue satin slipper?" asked Mrs. Priddy, who did not realize the danger of this question until too late.

"The same," declared the detective. "Now, if you will kindly hand it over—you must have it in the house."

"I know nothing whatever about it, and I have nothing more to say."

"You might save yourself a great deal of trouble," suggested the officer. "However if you won't talk, you won't."

Turning to his brother detective, he gave a few crisp instructions: "Go to the nearest telephone-booth and call up M. Jules Calabashe, manager of Mlle. Perigot. Tell him we have located the slipper and buckle, but, not having a search-warrant, we must await his action. You will find him at the Hôtel Magnifique. Tell him we will wait outside the house until he arrives. Then come back, and you will find me near the front of the house. Hurry, now, Jim."

Mrs. Priddy frantically called her husband's office, but was told that he had departed and would be away all day.

## V.

PROMPTLY at four o'clock Theophilus Priddy helped the young lady with the green parasol from the yellow roadster and escorted her to the house. Two pairs of eyes peered at them from a convenient hedge.

Sophie Zabrowski received a polite welcome from Mrs. Priddy, who soon discovered that the Russian was a refined and rather modest person, in spite of the green parasol. She spoke perfect English without the slightest foreign ac-

cent. She babbled over Mrs. Priddy like a child, and the dinner started merrily.

Still, there had been no opportunity for a private conversation with Theophilus. Mrs. Priddy had not had him alone for one moment since he had embarked upon his new career.

She could not even warn him of the presence of the detectives, and she felt like a person in the crater of a volcano that is more than liable to become active at any moment.

Nor were her apprehensions without foundation. Watkins had just begun to serve the roast when there was a tremendous commotion at the front door. Almost instantly there bounced into the dining-room a wildly gesticulating individual who still wore his silk hat jammed on the back of his head.

Mrs. Priddy realized immediately that the individual was M. Jules Calabashe, manager of Mlle. Perigot, and that he had come with the warrant.

M. Jules pointed an accusing finger at Mr. Priddy and shrieked: "Vipair! T'ief! And it iss you who have stole ze slippair from ze petite *ma'm'selle*. Look! I have here ze warrant—"

"Don't make a scene," said Mr. Priddy calmly, rising and beckoning to Watkins. "I acknowledge that your suspicions may be well founded. Watkins will bring the slipper. I am ready to accompany the officers. I am very sorry," bowing to the ladies.

The two detectives, who had followed M. Jules into the house, took Mr. Priddy in charge. It was all over in a minute. The men left the house. Mlle. Sophie Zabrowski wept and, after a decent interval, took her departure.

Mrs. Priddy wandered about in a sort of aphasia until Marie led her up-stairs to her room.

It was the worst night in the history of Mrs. Priddy, and there was no sleep in the Priddy household. At eight o'clock in the morning, weary and haggard, Mrs. Priddy answered the telephone in her boudoir. It was Theophilus. Not a Theophilus downcast, but a Theophilus triumphant.

"Don't worry, Agatha," said he. "I am out on bail. If I can only keep it out of the papers—"

Mrs. Priddy nearly fainted. The *papers!* She hadn't thought of them before.

"They'll never stick me for that robbery," continued Mr. Priddy. "I've got nine alibis framed up already. I'm coming home. I'll be out on the ten-five. G'-by!"

## VI.

THE heart of Mrs. Priddy yearned for a quiet hour with Theophilus. For two days she had been thinking, and as she had pondered she had gradually come to the conclusion that her poor husband, glue and all, was the only person in the world of any importance. Every strange turn of events strengthened her love for him.

Her arms were about the neck of Priddy the moment he opened the door. He was a criminal, but she loved him more than she had ever thought she could love any human being. Now that she was to lose him in the vast cavern of Ossining, the virtues that he had shown during ten years of married life rose one by one to smite her.

Mrs. Priddy wept until she could weep no more, and then she led him to the library.

"It's all my fault, dear," she confessed. "I drove you to it. I know I did. Every moment you spend in Sing Sing—"

"Sing Sing? Thunder!" replied Priddy. "I'm not going to Sing Sing. I didn't steal the blue satin slipper."

"Then who did?"

"Nobody stole it. I bought it. In fact, I bought two of them on Fifth Avenue two days ago. The buckle cost thirty-five cents."

"Then who is Mlle. Perigot?"

"Nobody at all. I invented her."

"And—and Sophie Zabrowski, the Russian?"

"She's just Bonita, of the vaudeville team of McGill and Bonita. You see, I hired them both for last evening. McGill is a good actor, don't you think? He was M. Jules Calabashe. They're married and a very happy couple. I have known McGill for fifteen years."

"But the detectives were here!"

"Yes. The tall one was Robinson, my bookkeeper, and the other was his assistant, Jim French. It was a pity to do it, old girl, but you and I were getting a little too far apart in our ways of living."

"I can forgive you all that," said Mrs. Priddy. "But who was the woman who called you on the telephone that night?"

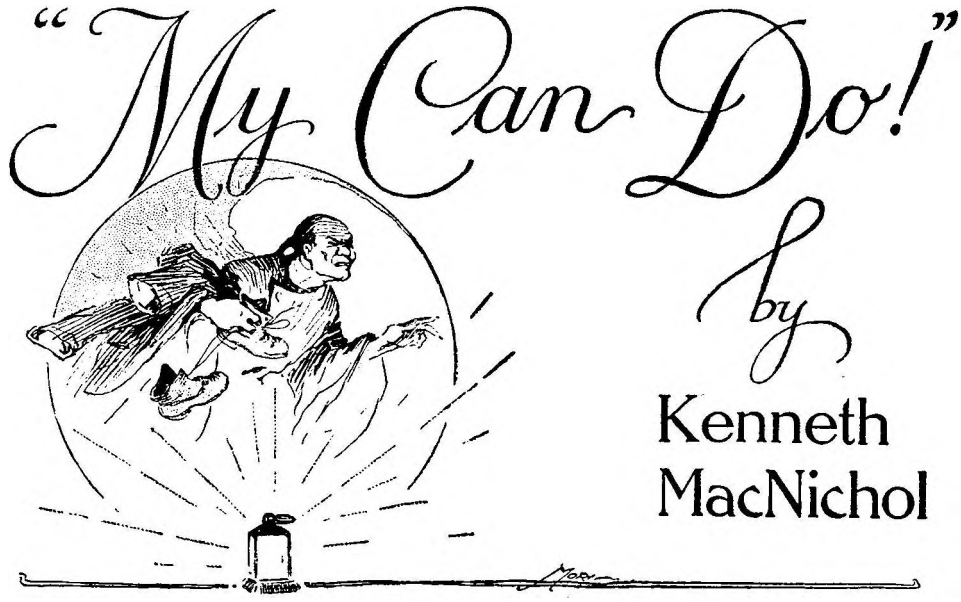
"My personal stenographer, Miss Jenkins. I instructed her to call me to the phone at about that hour. As to the rest, I am having the car painted black. It took me all the first night to learn how to run the blamed thing. I am going to bury this race-track suit now, and you and I are going to be happy."

Mrs. Priddy pillowed her head upon the shoulder of Theophilus, a thing she had not done in eight years, and sighed.

"Can't we take dinner down-town tonight, dear?" she asked. "Then, if you don't mind, I would like to go to the vaudeville performance and see McGill and Bonita. I am going to invite them out to dinner some night next week."

"Can you spare an evening?" asked Mr. Priddy in well-simulated amazement. "How about your career?"

"We are going to forget my career," replied Mrs. Priddy, nestling a little closer. "Hereafter it is going to be *our* career, and our career is going to be a sane combination of the glue business and domestic felicity."




SUCH a night comes but seldom even on the Pacific coast, clear and light, with all the winds of heaven loosed beneath the star-powdered sky. One could have leaned backward on that wind as against a wall. In the shelter of the unkempt cedars that formed a windbreak seaward the Old Hermitage, previously untenanted for many years, rocked and shivered with each fresh gust. Down in the Devil's Washbowl, a scant three hundred yards from the house, the gigantic breakers, rushing in over a thousand leagues of sea, crashed in glorious thun-

der against the cliff, the smoke of the conflict rising in a cloud. For half a mile inland one might have tasted the salt tang of spindrift in the air.

I did not even hear old Fong Chee when he came, entering softly as a shadow creeping through the open door. No more than an hour had I been asleep when gaspingly awakened by his cry of "Brother — brother! Waken, waken quickly!" spluttered loudly in rattling Cantonese.

Fong Chee's lantern was set in a pool of moonlight on the floor. The Chinaman stood beside my bed with all of my clothes clutched in a skinny hand—a strange Fong Chee, one whom I scarcely knew, so overwrought was he by some powerful excitement.

"Dless! Dless! Makee quick—hully, hully!" he cried, thrusting my clothes at me with indecent haste. "You go topside, makee fiah! Win' too muchee blow—my no can do! My boat he come—I see! You my flien'—you go! You savee, my no can do?" Our daily idiom was quite inadequate for his present needs.

Only when I firmly refused to budge an inch without more explicit information, Fong Chee attained a reasonable calm, although he was panting with haste to be away. But at last I understood.

Above the Devil's Washbowl the high, green Coast Range hills billow upward, smothering their heads in fog, scored at intervals by cañons planted thick with giant redwood. Years ago, at the head of Mal Paso Gorge, scarcely more than a crack between two great peaks, some one had cut a vein of coal, erected a shaft-house, and tunneled the mountain five hundred feet above the surf and perhaps a mile from the mouth of the cañon. The mine proved unprofitable, but a broken road wound tortuously up the gulch, ending before a rotting door hung on rusty hinges at the entrance to the mine.

In the mouth of that old tunnel, high in Mal Paso Gorge, for reasons Fong Chee best knew, I was to light a fire before the open door and keep it burning for a little while—a favor most difficult to grant since the road must be attempted in the whirling night with an ever-present risk of broken bones.

But, speaking strongly for the persuasive powers of Fong Chee, I acquiesced almost before I knew the promise had been made, and was still questioning when we were outside the door, across the field, and breasting the solid wind along the coastwise road. The questions were unanswered, for the words were snatched from the lips and whirled into the night with the breath that brought them forth. Fong Chee left me at the foot of Mal Paso Gorge, where the old road led steeply upward along an edge of cliff over a tiny stream.

Once behind the shelter of the cañon walls the wind was not so terrible; only the tops of the soaring redwoods thundered in great arcs across the narrow rift of sky. Turning as I picked the way carefully among the boulders, before the first rock shoulder interposed between, far below I saw old Fong Chee's lantern glimmering faintly, a will-o'-the-wisp that wavered down the coast. Far out at sea another light burned white, swinging high and low with the great roller's surge.

"You makee fiah," the Chinaman had said. "One owah, two owah, he bu'n—you savee me, he good. Mebbe-so li'l' boat, he likee see!"

They were absurd—the thoughts that came to me. The stories were all old stories that told of times when those wild shores had seen little boats go in and out at night, vessel-lights unlawfully extinguished, and slim, white revenue cutters gliding ghostlike along the coast. And yet that fire—a signal surely, though it could be no other than a warning sign, for opposite Mal Paso Gorge, close in, was a great reef covered less than two fathoms at low tide—the harvest grounds for the Japanese divers engaged at the abalone cannery on Wolf Point—and this was a bad, bad night for a little ship to dance so near the reef.

Then, over against this I was forced to put the fact that any light, when kindled in that cleft, could not be visible except from a very narrow space of sea—of what use is a beacon that cannot be seen? Indeed, when the fire had been built, after long stumbling upward beneath the wailing roof of winds, there was below me only darkness and the leaping sound of surf.

That vessel light I saw had surely passed—and not another captain on the coast would be enough the fool to venture near the reef on such a night.

Foolish and senseless, it seemed to me, that beacon light which I nursed carefully the allotted time. There was a strange flavor about the whole adventure which I did not like. For excuse I could only temporize, reasoning that the building of a fire is not unlawful, though the smoke arises in never so strange a place. That Fong Chee should want it lit was stranger still—but, after all, it was little enough I knew about Fong Chee.

Our first meeting had come about in a most ordinary way; he was stooped over a hoe-handle among the budding greenness of a tiny garden beside his tumble-down cabin at the foot of Mal Paso Gorge. He had invited me to inspect his growing crop of beans—nothing remarkable about him at all unless it was his face, which was unique among all the faces I have seen.

It was wrinkled, hideously yellow, bitten deep by scars that crossed at every angle, dominated by glittering slits of eyes that seemed wise as Confucius, old as the beginnings of the world. By no means a sinister face, only wholly and hopelessly ugly, but lighted now by a friendly apelike grin. He knew me, of course, for his nearest neighbor of the Hermitage a mile up coast.

Our friendship had grown as simply as the plants in Fong Chee's garden, for he knew all the best pools in which to go a fishing, and his knowledge of the sea was wonderful and exact.

So far as I could tell, he was simply a drunken, broken-down old Chinaman, a gleaner from the bounty of the sea, gathering sea-weeds, mussels, and abalones; wandering about the cliffs and beaches when the tide was out, sleeping when the tide came flooding in.

One day in each week he tramped ten miles to town, bowed down beneath his heavy bales of dried weed. There he would spend the night drinking rice-whisky and gambling at *fan-tan* or *pi-gow* with his countrymen. For a day and a night thereafter when he had returned to his cabin, he lay in his bunk with a jug of *sam-shu* within easy reach, nor rose until the jug was as empty of liquor as his head of dreams; but I never saw him the worse for the experience.

I thought of these things as I watched the fire burning at his behest. And one other thing I thought of that seemed strange; a remark he had made only the day before, speaking that weird mixture of "pidgin," his own few English words and a little Cantonese I had learned in Chinese ports—an idiom quite sufficient for our intercourse.

"My hop dlunk las' night," Fong Chee had said. "My dlink plenty *sam-shu;* my makee play *pi-gow.* Hunda' dolla' mebbe-so all gone."

I had thought that he was lying at the time—now I wasn't quite so sure. There was always the chance that his poverty was more assumed than real. But if true, that fact helped not at all to solve the puzzle.

It was dawn, gray dawn, with the smoking sea of silver flashing in low rollers on the beach, vacant of even a smoke-smudge on the near horizon, when I came down from the hills. The wind had died before the break of day. Only a gray squirrel chattering in the redwoods disturbed the serene quiet of early morning. From the chimney of Fong Chee's cabin the slow smoke drifted lazily; one could easily imagine him squatting before his fireplace boiling the everlasting pot of rice.

I had scarcely breakfasted before Fong

Chee arrived, by no means the energy-congested Chinaman of the night before, but rather my friendly companion of the hesitating grin, even to the bag of dripping sea-weed laid down at the door. He had nothing more interesting to offer me than an invitation to go fishing.

I came at no better explanation of that fire through the day, when the most careful inquiries couched in my choicest pidgin were tactfully misunderstood. But Fong Chee himself was unusually talkative that day, giving me a glimpse of his inner mind that I had not seen before, an interesting tale, but impossible to reproduce in his own dialect:

First, there was the father of Fong Chee, the worthy and honorable silk-merchant of Kwangtung. In the Year of the Great Drouth, when the mulberry-trees shed their leaves throughout the provinces, the Year's beginning had found the venerable silk-merchant unable to cancel debt, so he lost his face, and died of the disgrace.

Fong Chee accepted the debt as his own, in accordance with ancient usage, and in order that his father's spirit might find rest from wandering without Heaven's Gate, he journeyed far from the Flowery Kingdom into the strange land of the Foreign Devils, seeking what might be found.

In San Francisco he amassed much wealth; almost enough to redeem his father's face. But this was before the War of Seven Years broke out in the Six Companies over a matter of blood payment between the tongs.

Caught in the vortex of strife between the hatreds of Suey Sing and Sam Yup men, Fong Chee's wealth departed swiftly. In its stead he was given scars at the hands of a Suey Sing hatchet-man that, without quite killing him, transformed his face into a terrible mask that belied his character most shamefully.

When the Suey Sings made good their victory, Fong Chee became a recluse and gatherer of sea-weed on the California coast.

Not so heedful of his departed grandfather's interests was Li Ming, Fong Chee's son, the Chinese-American, member of the See-Yup tong which is the clan of the labor interests, writer for the radical newspaper, *Chung Sai Yat Po,* and secretary of the Ko Ming Tang, that revolutionary secret society of young Chinamen that later had more than a little to do with the overthrow of Manchu rule in the Middle Kingdom.

According to his philosophy, the grandfather lying calmly in his carven teak-wood coffin beneath three feet of Chinese sod was simply a dead and buried Chinaman, and there was an end of it. This philosophy was a very great sorrow to Fong Chee. But he had hopes—great hopes—that at last the honorable Yang, which is the spirit of All-Good, must gain merit over the accursed Yin, which is the essence of evil, though Yang must work in manners unforeseen of custom and even with children whom the ways of a strange land have made indifferent.

Good would prevail through the power of the blessed Shen and his departed ancestors, despite the machinations of the Kwei, who are devils of many kinds and worried him exceedingly.

I finally asked him why his home was not, even now, somewhere among the rice-fields of Kwangtung, or why, if the Suey Sing tong had forgotten the blood price on his head, he did not make the required payment and again seek the society of his kind. He hesitated just a trifle before answering:

"My no can do. My likee, no can do. My falla, he too muchee cash, no pay; mebbe-so my boy no likee do; mebbe-so my can. All same, Fong Chee no catchee face. Byme-by my mebbe-so got plenty cash; my come Kwangtung side. My falla go Sheng-ti byme-by—he good. You savee, flien? Quick, byme-by, my can!"

But the great longing that cried out in every word could no more be expressed in Fong Chee's broken speech than the kindliness and sympathy of the man could be limned in his twisted face.

From this he drifted into a long discourse on the ever-lucky and beneficent mysteries of jade—wholly without point, until, returning to the Hermitage that night, there appeared, apparently from nowhere, from beneath the papers on my table a wonderful bracelet of purest sea-green stone, mounted curiously in carven gold.

Afterwards Fong Chee disclaimed all knowledge of its origin, only remarking enigmatically: "He good; you keep all-time 'longside. Mebbe-so catch hop luck byme-by."

Could this be, I wondered, a payment for my effort on the hills? If so, what service had I rendered to merit such a gift?

For two days thereafter the question burned in me, uselessly, for Fong Chee had been to town again and was sleepily, hopelessly, happily drunk in bed. Some time before I had given him a picture of the great bronze Buddha of Lien-Ping, which he had promptly nailed to the wall of his cabin a mile from the Hermitage; now, as usual when drunk, he burned a great deal of cheap and evil-smelling punk before this shrine, seeming to forget that a fire had ever been kindled on the hills.

An abalone, says Webster, is a gasteropod having an ear-shaped shell, and a gasteropod is a univalvular mollusk which moves by means of a broad, muscular foot beneath the body—interesting, but not informative.

In simpler guise an abalone is a large sea-snail with a broad flat body covered with a single dome of shell, exercising a peculiar tenacity of attachment to the rocks when suddenly disturbed. However, a short bar of steel, inserted violently beneath the shell before the abalone has time to clutch and cling, converts him with his house into food, ornament, and sometimes treasure.

The fine white meat is a delicacy much appreciated by the Chinese; the shells polish beautifully into souvenirs for tourists; occasionally they contain a blister or pearl of considerable value. Therefore the abalone cannery on Wolf Point, and the Japanese divers working on Kelpie Reef, where, two fathoms under water at low tide—just deep enough to make the use of diving-suits an economy—lay great beds of shell.

José Valero, owner of the cannery, knew what other harvests might be garnered there.

Occasionally, through his acquaintance with the Japs, Fong Chee was allowed to put out with them in the motor launch to Kelpie Reef, and in return for his labor of assisting at the pumps, he was given a small amount of shell, unknown, possibly to José Valero who employed the Japs. It was an easier method of harvesting than searching the exhausted rock pools near the shore.

It was almost a week after the night of my adventure in the hills when Fong Chee's lantern came glimmering across the field just before dawn. Waking, I could hear him building a fire in the kitchen.

"Ho, brother," I called sleepily, "what now?"

"My likee tea," he answered. "Byme-by tide he good. My go catchee *gows*. You come long-side, all li'. Catchee hully, li'l' boat byme-by, he go."

From which I gathered that the tide was flowing out—a good time to pursue the elusive abalone in his lair. But it was to be no ordinary expedition — we were to go out with the canners of Wolf Point. I should have been lacking in curiosity if not anxious to see how the thing was done.

For quite awhile I had entertained a lurking hope that sometime I might be allowed to don a diving-suit with the heavy leaden shoes, the staring, fascinating eyes of shining glass, and with the great copper helmet like an inverted pot over my head, walk securely in the cool green depths, so marvelously changing and charming viewed through the window of the surface sea.

How, on that day with the launch securely anchored over Kelpie Reef, I finally achieved the courage to ask for a descent, I do not know, nor do I remember what words were used in the asking. A request so foolish caused some astonishment among the divers—the same feeling that a postman might have in seeing men walk for pleasure.

At first I got a flat denial; but later there was a whispered conference among the Japs, with interrogative glances directed toward Fong Chee who sat silent in the bow, his masklike face ejecting wreaths of vile smoke from a stubby and disreputable pipe. It was he who finally solved the difficulty with a diffident smile and the scarcely whispered affirmation, "My likee—he can do."

It did not occur to me until afterward that this was anything more than the vouching for a friend—an assumption of responsibility for my act in case of accident.

The shoes were heavy and the helmet smothering — how blurred the seascape through a solid inch of glass—the first step, how dragging and stumbling! The helmet was screwed down; for a moment I gasped before the blessed rush of air came from the pump—a little oily but no less welcome. Strong hands grasped at my arms—overboard I dropped into the shining sea, shutting my eyes involuntarily while the air sucked and bubbled in the pipe. Lightly as a bird descending on a twig my feet came down upon the ocean floor.

The tide was not quite at ebb; seeming far above me, the bottom of the boat was only a shadow on the surface of the sea. About me was a faint green mistiness of light, barred by the towering streamers of the kelp. I saw no fish, but a great rayed star came floating softly by; the ease with which one moved was most surprising. The ocean floor was literally paved with abalone shell, both red and black—I had not dreamed there could be so many in the sea, having known only occasional clusters in the pools.

Presently my eyes grew more accustomed to the light; the climbing seaweed ceased to be only shadow, and took on form. And then, looming through the purple water-haze, all about me I perceived a mystery — a strange, plantlike growth, tenuous of stem, bulbous at the top, kelplike streamers that did not raise to the surface of the sea but floated and wavered beneath the lowest reaches of the tide.

I drew one to me—hard, metalic bulbs they were, with stringy, wire stems; at the root of each curious stem another heavy bulb much larger than the floating sphere on top, weighted and motionless among the lesser waving growth of weeds.

Whence came this crop sown on the ocean floor? Men's planting, surely, but what queer harvest was meant for reaping here? How much of this planting was I meant to see—and what connection had this curious fruit with abalones? My mind flashed back to the signal fire in the hills, and Fong Chee, who had said, "he can do"—the wall of questions was like Seigfried's ring of flame; the secret in the middle of them all.

I suddenly lost all interest in further exploration and pulled the signal cord to be drawn up.

I tried my best not to seem disturbed when the helmet was unscrewed—if mystification was old Fong Chee's game, it was a game that two could play, no doubt. I noticed that he looked for some betraying sign—whether he was disappointed I am not sure. I managed to sit beside him quite indifferent while that odd sea fruit was hove aboard the boat—a load of abalones, then a load of those queer copper spheres — all heaped promiscuously together in the boat; when they were finished abalones and a canvas cover over all.

For once I had the advantage of Fong Chee—the answers to his hints and questionings were monosyllabic, very short at that.

Back at the Hermitage again I watched

the sea all day. Six trips that motor-boat made between dawn and dusk, returning to Wolf Point each time gunwale deep with shell. There was some weighty thinking done between the trips—in the end I determined at least one or two points to my own satisfaction. Of the answer I now felt sure—it was with José Valero who would not have recognized Fong Chee in meeting with him on the public highway. In private it might be quite another thing.

It was still early evening; his house on Wolf Point was less than two miles away. I determined to go calling on my neighbors.

The Portuguese greeted me with smiles and polite bowings—a handsome rascal with white teeth gleaming against the swarthy tan. In the best room, fastidiously neat, where knitted tidies on the plush rockers fought for attention with the saintly chromos brought from the Azores on the wall, he introduced me to the Senhora and several small editions of José.

"Eet is pleasure for which I have long weesh," said José. "So long you leeve so close an' not come before; I'm ver' beezy mans, or I come see you. De boy-ees say you been wiz boat to-day—I hope you have enjoy?"

"It was very pleasant," I said. "You must tell me more about your work. But it is warm—shall we sit on the bench outside?"

He acquiesced readily. Here the dusk was warmly beautiful. Looking out at sea from between the pines the eye of the lighthouse on Point Sur winked white and red across the miles between.

"Eet is not so much—dees li'l' business I have made," José observed most modestly.

"But there are several questions I could ask. For instance, suppose," I said, hesitating just a little bit, "suppose a lamp should be lighted in the window of your cannery on the Point—as it is lighted now. You know the great Sur Light cannot be seen from the road along the coast, but only from this Point—or from a little distance out at sea. Suppose also that a fire should be kindled in the old mine tunnel in Mal Paso Gorge, not to be seen from the ocean except at a certain point. Then, the place on the sea where all three lights could be seen at once would be a very, very little place—not so very much larger than the room behind us there.

"And suppose that place where all three lights could be seen was just over Kelpie Reef where you catch abalones? If something should be lost overboard from a little boat just in that place—in that one place and in no other, it would be easy to find it again—very easy, would it not, José? Even one of your abalone boats could find it—if your men knew just where that thing was lost. It would be still easier if there were many things—for instance, smuggled goods enclosed in air-tight copper shells?"

I do not know just what Valero thought of that; at the time I did not particularly care. There was a considerable space of silence before he spoke, but as he lit a cigarette, the match-flame glowing brightly in the dark, I could see that it was trembling in his fingers.

"I t'ink, my frien'," said he finally, "it is one t'ing or anodder—you know too much, or mebbe not enough." I felt that he surveyed me furtively. "If I t'ink, my frien', you have learn too much—so much so you mus' tell some odder one of the men who look an' look an' never see—I jus' call once a li'l' call to my boy-ees—an' to-morrow the fishes have great *fiesta* in the sea. But there is plenty time—you would not know so much if—"

"You mean Fong Chee?" I interrupted casually. "Are you his man, or is he your man, Valero? But let me tell you straight, I am not a revenue man, and Fong Chee is my friend—it was I who built the fire in Mal Paso just the other night. I did that much in the

dark—but now I want the rest, and I reckon it is up to you to tell."

"Ah, it was you who built the fire, then, when the win' blow so hard!" I fancied his voice had in it a feeling of relief. "Jus' that much make you one of us, my frien'—if we are caught—jail, if the knife not fin' you first. All dees Fong Chee know, an' he let you see—what he say goes wiz me.

"Fong Chee is boss, my frien'—you on'erstand—he's my boss all long time, five year, seex year, an' he's mak me reech. From Mazatlan in Mexico dose li'l' boats is come, ev'ry month one boat or mebbe two. Fong Chee's boats all takin' odder t'ings to San Francis'—only some li'l' t'ings which are not go. Dose t'ings, pearls an' silk an' jade an' opium, go overboard at night on Kelpie Reef, nice an' tight in all dose copper shell—my boy-ees is feesh heem out wiz abalone. Pearls an' jade an' sometime opium go in my li'l'l abalone cans—sen' to a Chinese in San Francis'—abalones an' odder tings all in a box togedder.

"Sometime pearls go wiz ze abalone pearls so nobody ask questions; sometime silk an' odder tings go out tie up in Fong Chee's bales of weed. Here is only us, but Fong Chee's cousin live in Monterey. In San Francis' is odders I dunno; in Mazatlan an' China I'm not know—but always Fong Chee he is boss by me."

After a moment José added a bit of gossip he could not keep back.

"Fong Chee, I t'ink now he is ver' reech—an' you know w'at he want that money for, my frien'?—to go back China an' give it all away; long time ago he tol' me so myself. He is a crazy-man, but he's not bodder me s'long he's work get done. I'm mak' dees money ver' fas' myself, an' how he's spen' he's money I'm no care."

It was a very simple and complicated scheme, as O. Henry might have said, taking it all around; characteristic of the Oriental mind in every feature. No wonder the revenue-hunters of Uncle Sam—and there are none more efficient in the world—had never even smelled a mouse about, or, if they had, were unable to find the hole.

All the way home along the coastwise road I was going over the details in my mind; first, Fong Chee, the poverty-stricken gatherer of weeds, known as a half-wit up and down the coast; José Valero, innocently engaged in business on Wolf Point; the Japanese divers, with such an obvious object in their work; the coasting schooners legitimately trading out of Mazatlan, with some bought Mexican custom officer, no doubt, winking at the cargo; the providential innocent arrangement of lights and reef, with the government light itself a signal for the smugglers; back of that—how far back, who could tell?—the Chinese traders in some Kwangtung port loading up the precious copper spheres; none of them known to others, but with old Fong Chee, with the wise old eyes, at the critical point where the goods were entered, watching over all, reaching out long arms, directing every move.

Where before was there ever a smuggler chief so insignificant—a Chinese pack-horse, bowed beneath his weed, dragging his feet along the coastwise road?

His cabin was deserted in the morning. For almost a week thereafter I could discern no sign of life. I was surprised to find that I missed the cheerful spattering of his speech and the friendly, hesitating grin on his ugly face. One does grow used to thinking by new standards—I could not find it in my heart to blame him for his deeds.

For in my consciousness now, as in Fong Chee's, there was visioned the teakwood coffin of his father lying dishonored in a Kwangtung grave. Balancing old Fong Chee's lifetime of devotion to that father's soul—to his mind tangibly alive, but wandering outside of heaven's gate—against the loss of revenue to Uncle Sam—well, the moral obligation to Uncle Sam seemed not so great as it otherwise

might have been. For the great Yang moves curiously in the dark, and Tao, the universal reason, seems to approve the acts.

Have I here given the impression that Fong Chee had no love for this, his adopted land? Well, that would not be at all true.

"He gone Flisco — byme-by come back," Fong Chee's cousin told me when I had questioned him in Monterey. But I watched the smoke rise from his cabin through two mornings before I caught a sight of him again—a sorry figure roosting on the rocks, like a great, black cormorant looking out to sea — gazing straight across the sea's immensity rolling between the coasts of California and Kwangtung.

He did not look up at me as I approached—not for a considerable interval before I spoke: "Fong Chee—my hop savee how you catchee *gows*—my make one piecee look — you savee — now my know!"

And then old Fong Chee looked at me, curious, detached; looked at me and then out at the sea.

"All gone," said old Fong Chee. "My plenty cash all gone. My go Flisco; come 'longside, my boy. Li Ming, my boy, he likee catch hop cash—all same in China makee levolute"—the strange new word was halting on his lips—"numba-one man China allee-same he go; catchee now all same like 'Melican. My boy, Li Ming, he likee cash, my pay. My falla, he stay this side, mebbe-so; mebbe-so he catchee Sheng-ti byme-by. This time in China plenty men hop die—my boy, say catchee plenty cash, he good. All gone—my li'l' boat—my plenty cash—all gone. My falla mebbe-so no likee stay this side; all same, my no can do!"

Pitiful and amazing, that story; unbelievable of old Fong Chee. But it was true. His "plenty cash" had indeed gone to line the coffers of the revolutionists at the behest of Li Ming, his son; against every old presumption and belief, he had given it in order that "plenty men" should not "hop die" to no avail, in order that "byme-by" all China might be "all same like 'Melican." But even now a ray of hope shone through, for Fong Chee presently remarked, with a shadow of former humor in his eyes:

"All same, my got one-hunda-dolla catch 'longside. Byme-by my mebbe-so can do!"

Old friend of mine, my half-mad Chinaman toiling alone with your sorrow and your dream—would ever your gods bring "plenty luck" to you?

Years afterward — I think it was the occasion when Dr. Sun Yat Sen revisited America, although I am not now sure—I attended a great Chinese banquet in the rebuilt Chinatown of San Francisco after the flame. The master of ceremonies was a sleek, fat, wholly Americanized Chinaman, Li Ming—owner and editor now of *Chung Sai Yat Po*, that newspaper which is no longer revolutionary, but better represents the interests of Sam Yup Tong, whose only god is gold—playing the part of a rich merchant now, oily, prosperous, politely affable.

As Chinese banquets do, this banquet floated on a sea of purring speech until nearly morning before I found an opportunity to address Li Ming.

"He is a veree, veree foolish old man," said Li. "It was deeficult to make him on'erstand how much we needed money for the great revolt which made us rich, and brought back the old-time fortunes to our honorable house. But you, who know the old writings of the great Kong-fu-tze will on'erstand when I say Fong Chee acquired much merit by the gift. He is in Kwangtung now, and owns a veree pretty place, with a big farm and many flowers, where I visited him about a year ago. It was veree foolish for him to pay the debt of my grandfather, which is not now required by the law—my grandfather had a veree magnifeecent funeral."

Great are the wonder-workings of the Yang!

# Heart to Heart Talks

## By the Editor

PERHAPS you remember how, shortly after the outbreak of the European war, going on three years ago, Germany lost her foothold in China when the Japanese captured Tsingtao. The papers mentioned it more or less briefly, as well as the brave and gallant defense of the little town on the part of the German defenders. They didn't mention, however, or at least very few of them did, the affair of the

## FIFTY BELTS OF GOLD

**BY A. H. C. MITCHELL**

**Author of "The Grand Getaway," "One Woman in a Million," etc.**

Of course, what little the papers said about it was not so labeled. All they mentioned was the fact that a German officer, captured by the Japanese when the fortress fell, had managed to escape.

As a matter of fact, *Lieutenant Eschwege* managed to get to the United States. There he met an old school-chum of his, and to him and to his *fiancée* he recounted the history of the quarter of a million dollars he had left buried where the Japanese could not find it.

But—and on this depends a stirring and mighty interesting novelette—he also told it, without in the least being aware of it, to two of the cleverest crooks in New York.

What those crooks did with the knowledge they possessed, what the lieutenant did, and what happened to his friend and his friend's sweetheart—well, that's up to you to find out. Incidentally, this is just short of a book-length novel—and only one of the fascinating features of next week's magazine!

* * *

ON a newspaper, the job of "picture chasing" is not a very lofty one, and when *Kirk Bronson* of the *Investigator* was reduced from the considerable reportorial pinnacle he had achieved to the business of chasing pictures, he felt compelled to devise ways and means to "get back" at the unkind city editor who was responsible for his downfall. And in "THE PICTURE CHASER," by William Charles Lengel, you will learn how *Bronson* not only got back, but also "got there" in several directions at the same time. It is not often that we allow ourselves to print a newspaper or "shop" story, but this one is so neatly and cleverly done, that we could not resist the temptation, and so—well—next week you'll know why we were tempted and fell. *Some* story!

ANYTHING that is done hurriedly is likely to be more cause for regret than congratulation. Sometimes the gods are good and direct a blind stab for fortune or happiness straight to the mark, but the chances are that "haste makes waste"—which becomes very serious, indeed, when the subject under discussion is matrimony. "ON THE SPUR OF THE MOMENT," by Jennie Harris Oliver—who has written some excellent stories for us in the near past—is a clever and convincing little problem story that is chock-full of action from the minute that *Barbara*, believing in her destiny, takes a long, long chance on another woman's sweetheart. You'll like the humanness of this story; but then, Miss Oliver always makes her characters stand out from the printed page and become "one of us."

"SKIMPS: SHIP'S BOY," by Captain A. E. Dingle, is a study in incorrigible vagabondage that will amply repay you in pleasure for the time you take to read it. It isn't very long, but it is a very clean-cut, intimate tale of a youngster's precarious flight from an orphan asylum to the fo'c's'le of the Olinda. *Skimps* is human. You'll be glad to know him.

## THE TRIBE OF TARZAN ORGANIZED

THE boys of Staunton, Virginia, have organized the first Tribe of Tarzan. They would like to hear from boys in other cities and towns who are interested in forming tribes in their own jungles. The men of Staunton are helping the boys of Staunton. The latter have a Tribe Room where they hold their meetings; they have grass ropes, bows and arrows, hunting knives, and the author of "Tarzan of the Apes" is having medallions struck for them symbolic of *Tarzan's* diamond-studded golden locket. Boys who are interested are invited to write to HERMAN NEWMAN, Acting Chief of THE FIRST TRIBE OF TARZAN, 113 North Jefferson Street, Staunton, Virginia.

The editors of the ALL-STORY extend their heartiest congratulations and best wishes to Herman Newman and his Tribe, and assure them that they will do all in their power to help make the organization such a brilliant success that, in a short time, it shall rival, in membership and popularity even, the Boy Scouts. It is our earnest hope and belief that in a few years Tribes of Tarzan will exist in every city and town in the United States, and will have become, not only a source of keen joy and amusement to the youth of the country, but also a powerful influence for their good.

NOTICE.—Inquiries concerning stories that we have published will be answered in the Heart to Heart Talks only when the name of the author as well as the title of the story is supplied by the correspondent.

## "TARZAN" BURROUGHS'S BEST WORK

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed you will find ten cents in stamps, for which send me an ALL-STORY issue of November 26, in which the second instalment of "Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar" is found. I was busy with my work that week, and did not get to go down town until Monday, and to my disappointment found that not a single news-dealer in town had a copy of that issue. Personally, I think the *Tarzan* series are the greatest fiction that ever came from the pen of Burroughs, or any other writer. I have read all of them, and am now waiting for the next one, which I hope will appear some of these days.

I have been a constant reader of the ALL-STORY for several years, and have about come to the decision that it is the best all-round fiction magazine published to-day.

Achmed Abdullah's stories are intensely interesting, especially his African stories. And "Mid-Ocean" promises well, too. One little feature which I think quite nice is the little poems that appear from week to week. I only wish there were more of them.

Count on me for speaking a good word for the ALL-STORY every time the opportunity presents itself. Very sincerely,

Dayton, Ohio. J. D. K.

## GRATEFUL TO ALL-STORY

TO THE EDITOR:

Most everybody is praising your magazine, but when one thinks it over, I guess I have a whole lot more to be grateful for to the ALL-STORY than many others.

I am an invalid, and though father and mother get all sorts of magazines for me, I like the ALL-STORY best, for two reasons—because I don't have to wait a month for the continuation of stories, and because your stories are good and clean.

Please publish more of E. K. Means's works, but please, no baseball or football stories. They are *so* hard to understand, and when you're only twenty years old and have to sit in a wheel-chair, you want something "easy."

JANE DARCY GREY.

Brooklyn, New York.

## ALL GOOD WRITERS

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a "near" constant reader of your magazine (every time that I could beg, borrow, steal, or buy it), since the first *Tarzan* tale, and I cannot say too much for its superexcellence in the magazine world. The best evidence that I can give of my liking for it is the fact that it is the only magazine of its kind that I have ever read regularly for more than four consecutive numbers, and I am an inveterate reader of magazines and good fiction. I greatly admire the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs and Octavus Roy

Cohen (who, by the way, is my next town neighbor), and of the other good writers that contribute to you I cannot say too much, for they are all good.

ROBERT KELTON,
Onconta, Alabama. Probate Clerk.

## "BREATH OF THE DRAGON" FINE

TO THE EDITOR:

I have just finished reading "Breath of the Dragon," and think it just fine. Why so many kick about some of the stories you print I can't see. You can't please everybody. As for myself, I like them all, more or less. Isn't Mr. Spears going to write any more about *Janie Frete?* Am anxiously waiting for the sequel to "The Green Sachem," and what has become of J. U. Giesy and Achmed Abdullah? They are two more of my favorites.

I like all your writers, more or less. Haven't a kick coming. Some time ago you printed a letter of mine in Heart to Heart Talks, and I have received nineteen letters in answer so far from every part of the globe. You sure have *some* circulation.

ADELE CRAWTHORN.
Room 305, Vendome Building,
Nashville, Tennessee.

## "FOUR WAYS FROM THE ACE"

TO THE EDITOR:

Like many other men of the service, I am afflicted with the reading microbe, which reaches its highest development here on the Border. I have just finished "Too Much Efficiency," and it was, to use a term, "there four ways from the ace." Being an instructor in mess management, *et cetera,* and having just finished a series of twenty lectures on kindred subjects, I can fully appreciate the story. Mr. Rath had me going for the first four parts, but the fifth and climax were, to say the least, a complete surprise, although a rather pleasant one.

Since most of your correspondents state their choice in stories, I may as well add my bit. Mr. Rath has written some of your best and most interesting stories. I saw a production of "One-Cylinder Sam" (photoplay), and it is from this kind of material that films with the "punch" are made. Edgar Rice Burroughs is very easily equal to any in his stories of *Tarzan;* although purely fictional, they are still interesting.

You have a strong staff of writers, and many are the idle moments pleasantly passed with the ALL-STORY WEEKLY here where we are a long way from dear old New York, and so far from the greatest city in all the world, San Francisco, that it seems only a memory.

GEO. H. PRYOR.
Douglas, Arizona.

## LEVEE CAMP LIFE

TO THE EDITOR:

I am a reader of the ALL-STORY, and thought I would write to you asking why you never print any stories about levee camp life. I have often longed to see an outlining of the road-grader's life, as I myself am a full-fledged tent-dweller.

You have stories of life in the cities and on the farms, of factories and rivers (which are mostly all good), but I have never seen one of men who build roads for the country.

When a person is traveling over a public highway, he may remark about the good road, but he knows nothing whatever about what it has taken to put that good road where it is.

I often hear people talking of camping (pleasure camping), but they fool themselves—they don't know what real camping is. With some people it is a life loved as a sailor loves the sea and as a cowpuncher loves the plain or as a hunter loves the woods—it is life, and I am of that kind. I don't go into half a dozen houses in a year. My life has been spent in tents since I was eleven years old, and I suppose it will always be so.

I must close, or else this will be a story of levee camp life.

Hoping to hear something of the life I love,
Scola, Mississippi. REX B. WIESON.

## CUT A MEAL—NOT ALL-STORY

TO THE EDITOR:

I found the slip in my last number of ALL-STORY WEEKLY advising my year's subscription expired on the 9th inst.

I canvassed the situation very thoroughly, and concluded I would have to let go of some of my reading matter owing to the cost of high living and the difficulty in securing business; and while I could drop some of the other magazines I have been taking with perfect equanimity, found I would rather go without one meal a day than be without your very entertaining weekly.

I therefore enclose my check for four dollars, and hope to receive the ALL-STORY next week, as usual.

All the stories are good, but the ones written by your male authors are preferable to my way of thinking, owing to the thrill and excitement that can only come from a masculine mind.

Yours very truly,
Auburn, GEORGE H. MACOMBER.
New York.

## ANOTHER MEANS ENTHUSIAST

TO THE EDITOR:

I am a newcomer in the ranks of the ALL-STORY army, and have but one regret to state

regarding my enlistment. That is, I am constantly sorry I did not join years ago. Have been taking the ALL-STORY about two months now, since which time I have given up my search for a really good magazine; I found it.

Have read two of E. K. Means's yarns, and wish to pronounce them all wool and a yard wide. I noticed an inquiry in Heart to Heart Talks recently as to whether the characters therein portrayed are real, and if they live. I just want to say in reply that they are, and they do. I do not know whether they live in name or not, but I know that they live in personality. I have met them in our Southern States more than once. By the way, let's have some more right soon.

It would take too long to say which of the stories I liked best; in fact, I have not decided yet. (I mean all the stories in the issues I have read.) But I did not like "The Stroke of Twelve" at all. That is just by way of criticism, however, and not fault finding. With best wishes to all for a successful New Year, I am,

Yours most sincerely,
S. F. MILLER.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

## E. K. MEANS BRINGS PLEASANT DREAMS

TO THE EDITOR:

Just a few lines of appreciation for your fine magazine, the ALL-STORY. It surely is a winner, and deserves every bit of praise it receives.

While I always enjoy reading the serials, I also must give credit to the short stories, which always appeal vastly to me, especially those a little "different." Among the short stories that I especially liked are "The Green God," "The Dead Line," "Bagged," "Sad Sadie," "The Sleeping Sickness," and *each and every one* of Jennie Harris Oliver's stories; I do wish they would continue, as I enjoy them so much. I also love E. K. Means's negro stories. He surely must have a vast knowledge of negro dialect, for his stories are so amusing, the language in which his characters converse being so strange. I like to read an E. K. Means story before going to bed, for then I am assured of pleasant dreams, after several hearty laughs at his characters.

Very cordially yours,
MISS MURIEL E. GAMMONS.

Attleboro Falls,
Massachusetts.

# LETTERETTES

All of your authors are good, especially Zane Grey, E. R. Burroughs, and others too numerous to mention. Give us some more of "The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms," by Achmed Abdullah.

I will close my letter by saying again that the ALL-STORY is the best fiction magazine now out.

Yours truly,
R. A. NARVOES.

1024 W. Houston Street,
San Antonio, Texas.

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I have been a silent reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for several years, and the only fault I can find with it is that it is not composed entirely of E. K. Means stories. Some of my darkest hours are brightened by his negro stories. As the old saying goes, "Laugh and grow fat," so his stories are good for the health.

P. O. Box 711, MRS. R. B. PORTER.
Midland, Texas.

---

I am an enthusiastic reader of the ALL-STORY, and I think that when compared with any other weekly magazine it has them beat every day.

JOHN E. HOLDEN.

P. O. Box I 16,
St. Thomas College,
St. Paul, Minnesota.

---

I want to tell you what a splendid magazine you publish.

In your number for November 11 the story, "Two Fares Back Home," was great. Can you induce Mr. Sorrells to write a series of stories, using *Joe* as the principal character? Not those disgusting love stories, but a story of *Joe's* life and his songs.

HARVEY L. WILSON.

3 Guyton Street,
Atlanta, Georgia.

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Having been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for months, I want to express my appreciation of the magazine. I have enjoyed particularly "The Fugitive Sleuth," "The Reckless Age," "Breath of the Dragon," "The Black Cloud," "The Brass Check," Raymond Spears's stories, and others.

Very truly yours,
SARAH A. ALISON.

New York, New York.

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Several weeks ago you asked how we like the Western stories. I think if you could give us more stories like "The Lone Star Ranger," "The Border Legion, "To the Victor," "The Last of the Duanes," "Sand," and "On a Stallion Shod With Fire" it would be fine to keep them going.

Some of the stories I don't like, but I can't kick, because the majority of them are fine.

ERNEST GRAY.

Decatur, Alabama.

# Stenographers ——make this Salary-Raising test

How fast can you typewrite the 584 words in this advertisement of the wonderful New Way in Typewriting? The average operator writes about 30 to 40 words a minute—and earns only $8 to $15 weekly. The Tulloss "New Way" operator easily writes 80 to 100 words a minute—receives $25 to $40 a week. Employers pay for one thing only—**for finished work.** Any stenographer earning $25 or more a week will tell you that **quantity and quality of typewritten work** are the secret of bigger salaries! Employers gladly pay greatly increased wages to those who become expert on the typewriter, as shown by the striking salary-increases of "New Way" operators everywhere.

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**Doubled Salary**

Salary is **exactly double** what it was when I took up the study of the Tulloss Method. ANNA S. CARLSON, 109 Hieiner St., Harrisburg, Pa.

**Two Increases**

Since writing the letter you saw, telling of a 40 per cent increase, I have had another increase of 20 per cent. C. E. VERRALL, 66 Olney St., Providence, R.I.

**Earns $150 a Month**

From $70 a month when I took up the study, I was soon drawing $150—salary more than doubled. There is no comparison whatever between the Tulloss Method and the ordinary systems. A. H. GARDINER, 429 Hawthorne Place, Madison, Wis.

**100 Words a Minute**

Formerly I never exceeded 50 words a minute, but since taking up the Tulloss Method have written as high as 100. R. R. MASTIN, Norval Bros., Law Office, Seward, Nebraska

### 80 to 100 Words a Minute—Entirely New Method

Mastery of the New Way in Typewriting is the most startling, most productive and most profitable acquirement a stenographer can secure. The New Way is different, unique, yet sensible and simple and amazingly resultful. It is a wholly new idea, as applied to typewriting, yet centuries old in another vocation. Special gymnastic finger-training **away from the machine** brings results in days that no other method can ever produce. Though comparatively new, thousands have by it already increased their speed from 30 to 40 words a minute to 80, 90 or 100 or even more. With this infinitely greater speed has come great accuracy. Their work is errorless, neat, clean. And this increased speed and accuracy has boosted salaries to $25, $30 and even $40 a week. Moreover, the work is done easier, with less fatigue.

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*—golden dreams flooded the man's soul—*

*dreams that swiftly leaped to the inevitable—dreams that mingled joy and pain, the cry of unborn life, the solemn mystery of creation, the glory of this new, ineffable miracle.*

*"Sylvia!" he whispered, with the girl's breath hot upon his lips. "Sylvia!"*

*The girl's arms encircled Bradford lovingly.*

*"Hold me tight, tight, tight!" she whispered tremulously. "I want to be all yours!"*

*His answer was another kiss that drew their souls into one soul. And in that kiss they knew the truth, sounded the depths, and stood upon the heights of joy.*

This is an excerpt from the most talked of novel of the season—

# The Gift Supreme

*From the pen of*

## GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

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