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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 29, 1917

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

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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXXIX NUMBER 2

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29, 1917

Caesar's Wife

by Katharine Eggleston

Author of "The Morton Mystery," "Flaming Hearts," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS ENGAGEMENT.

"YES, I'll come."

The voice was faint. The hand that held the receiver trembled. Perhaps the speaker at the other end of the wire heard the indecision, guessed the fright.

"I—I promise."

The receiver fell from the quivering hand. For a moment the great dark eyes of the girl seemed to see all the space in the luxurious room peopled with forms of terror. Then she drew a long breath; a look of determination came into her lovely face; and she went swiftly from the library.

In her own room she started toward the bell to ring for her maid. Then she seemed to think better of it. In less than five minutes she was dressed and looked from between the edges of her fur collar at her own pale face in the mirror.

Her wide eyes misted with tears. Her soft lips trembled. Then, as if to defy further weakness, she seized her muff and ran from the room. Again at the top of the stairs, she paused. She listened intently.

But the silence below was not reassuring for another difficulty confronted her. She dared not call her own car. Suddenly, darting lightly as a bird, she crossed to a front window. The quick glance through it satisfied her. She descended the stairs noiselessly, unseen. In another moment Berenice Brayton stood outside the door of her own home.

She held up her hand. The taxi at the opposite curb darted toward her. She scarcely breathed the address to the chauffeur. She thrust a bill toward him.

"Please—do not—tell where—you take me!"

"Certainly not, madam," the chauffeur answered punctiliously and as if he did not detect the fear in the suppressed voice.

He climbed into his place. Berenice pulled back her sable sleeve and looked at her wrist-watch. It was just eleven. Finney, the taxi-driver knew the time, too, by the chimes from a church near by.

At the same time, the butler looked into the library and saw that Mrs. Brayton was no longer there. He reported the fact to Elise, her maid, who waited in the servant's hall, momentarily expecting her mistress to summon her.

It was almost twelve when Phelps Brayton sprang from his car in front of his own house.

Finney was back at his post across the street. He saw Brayton go into his home. He whistled under his breath.

He peered into the drawing-room, won-

dering where he would find her waiting for him. The nest in the pillows of her favorite chair told that she had been there.

She had gone up-stairs. Tired with the luxury of a whole evening without him, she had been unable to stay awake.

He approached the door between his apartment and hers with blood singing. He knocked softly. There was no answer.

She was asleep—sound asleep. Amused at having caught her napping he turned the knob. He would find her dark head burrowed childishly into the white of her pillow. Both hands would be curved till the backs of them rested against her cheeks like two white buds that supported a fully-opened flower. When he touched her gently she would wake slowly, as they do who have nothing to dread.

For a moment longer he stood with his hand on the knob, anticipating the moment of shyness with which she always welcomed his entrance in her room. Then he turned the knob and went in.

She was not on the chaise-longue before the fire. He turned and stood still, regarding the coquettish mystery of her couch. It had white curtains over pink, thin and sweeping as silken mists flushed with dawn light. He drew them back. She was not there.

The disappointment was poignant. He looked about the room. The windows were closed. The bed was smooth. Her night-dress and negligee with the dainty paraphernalia of her night toilet were not laid out. Evidently she had not thought of retiring.

He went rapidly into the hall and down-stairs. Fears he told himself were childish rushed into his mind.

Berenice Brayton had been reared in a fashion peculiarly appealing to a man like Phelps. Left immensely rich and entirely alone at the age of twelve, she had been dignifiedly mothered by a maiden friend of her own mother's. Miss Fessenden's chief interest lay in preserving the social order which seemed right and fine to her. She was picturesquely old-fashioned, with the punctilious insistence upon gentle breeding that had given to Berenice a singular charm. For she had taken the grace of the older ways and molded it into more modern expression. But she had never had the freedom that many of her own friends took as their right.

When Phelps reached the small drawing-room where she often received her intimates, he was obliged to face the fact that she was not in any one of the places where she would most naturally have awaited him. He forced himself to pause when his impulse was to rush wildly about, crying out for her.

He told himself she *must* be in the house. But the conviction was heavy on him that she was not there.

He wondered if, in spite of her assertions to the contrary, she might not have been a trifle hurt at his going to the banquet of his fraternity. Perhaps, to punish him for the long evening she had been obliged to spend alone, she meant to frighten him a bit.

At first he refused the thought. She had never shown any such spirit. Then, as he went from place to place over the house, he began to cling to it.

He met the assistant butler, who asked if he had rung for his valet. Phelps said he had not and went on. Then he stopped and told the man to send Mrs. Brayton's maid to him in the library.

As he passed a mirror he saw that his face gave testimony of his alarm.

But where would Berenice go? The question leaped up, almost as if it flaunted the stupidity of his assumption at him. Where would she go? She, who had never in her life been out from under the shelter of her home at night without a companion, had not the habit of going about—

Elise came in. He felt weak with the fall of his heart away from the safe support of hope. He tried to speak casually.

"Elise, if *madame* has not retired, I should be pleased to have her join me here," he made himself say as he helped himself to match and cigar.

"*Madame* went to her room at eleven, *monsieur*," was the girl's reply.

"You have finished, then?" he said, his voice uncertain in spite of his effort to be calm.

"No, *monsieur*, I wait. *Madame* has not rung for me."

"You have been inattentive," he said shortly, the pain in his heart forcing some outlet.

"I hope not, *monsieur*. *Madame* did not dress for dinner, since you were not at home. Perhaps she has gone to bed without me. It was a simple gown and needed no—"

"Thank you, Elise. You may retire. *Madame* will not need you—since I am here."

It was not a part of Phelps Brayton's method to jest with servants. He made his little observation so awkwardly that Elise backed out of the room with curiosity shining from her keen, young eyes.

"My God!"

Brayton did not say it aloud. It was uttered deep in his perplexed mind. He was simply unable to cope with a situation so extraordinary.

He waited in the library till a quarter to one. By that time he was fighting foolish fears as well as those in which he might reasonably indulge.

But the glaring fact that thrust up through them all was that Berenice had none of the intimates to whom she might have gone to spend a lonely evening. Her one relative, the maiden aunt, had died within a year after their marriage. Her exceptionally-protected life had not encouraged in her the ways of many women who spend much time from home. Where she went, he went with her. During the day, she rode with a chauffeur and footman. A groom went with her for her daily exercise around the park. Elise or his sister, Isobel, shopped with her. In the immense popularity they experienced he was her constant attendant. Now she was out of his house and—

He sprang up from his chair. Why had he not thought to ask if she had gone in her own car? But the very idea of it met no encouragement in his distracted mind. Where would she go? However, he called the garage. An answer was long in coming. He recognized the voice of Berenice's chauffeur.

"George, after you came in from driving Mrs. Brayton this evening, did you find her—her hand-bag in the car?" he asked, unable to bring himself to the actual inquiry he wanted to make.

"I haven't been out this evening, sir. *Madame* has never used her car at night since I came, sir," was the answer.

"Very well, George."

With that calm reply to the chauffeur, Phelps Brayton parted with his enforced coolness. He ran up-stairs. Again he went into Berenice's room. He rushed to the big dress-closet.

"Berenice! Berenice!" he called, switching on the lights and moving along the space before the gowns in their silk sheaths.

But there was no answer. The soft gowns gave limply as he pressed his hands against them, hoping to come on the firmness of her young body hidden there. The faint sweetness they held breathed out to him; but it had no comfort. He leaned against the wall and stared at the place he had searched. Its fulness did not contain her. It was coldly empty to him.

He made his way back to her room, hoping to find her sitting there, waiting to laugh at him. But she was not. In an agony of fear, he called her again. No answer came.

One of those unaccountable trifles, which propel human beings so powerfully and fatefully at times, controlled Brayton's next action. He went to the front window and lifted the blind.

The taxi across the street wheeled from the curb and darted toward the house as if it had awaited a signal. Rushing headlong, as if he had actually beckoned it, Brayton got into his coat and hat and raced to the street.

Something about the practised ease with which Finney made the curb, jumped down and flung the door wide, started an idea in Phelps's mind.

"You've had another fare from here to-night?" he said shortly.

"I have, sor," Finney replied.

"Take me to the same place."

Phelps was in the taxi. Finney scrambled into his seat. But he was remembering what the lady had said. She had asked him not to tell where she went.

The man inside was her husband. Finney had seen them go in and out of the house.

The lady was as beautiful as day and the young husband seemed to be proudly conscious of it. They had been almost inseparable.

But she had asked him to keep her secret. Finney wondered if she could have meant that he was to keep it from her husband. But his hand acted almost before his brain had decided. He turned his car into a cross street and shot toward Broadway. Three minutes later he swung to the curb before a cheap dance-hall.

"Whom did you bring here?" Finney heard his fare demand in an indignant voice.

"One of the maids, sir—the one that takes out the Pomeranians, sir."

"Go back!"

Finney went back. His mood warmed pleasantly with the thought that he had served the lady a good turn.

Suddenly he heard his fare ordering him to return. He almost gasped in his amazement.

"To that dance—" he began.

"Yes."

"Can you beat that?" Finney asked the night, contempt on his Irish lip, anger in his chivalrous heart.

He drove back to the palace of Terpsichore.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN LOVE DIES.

BRAYTON went to the doorkeeper of the place. He questioned him. He was obliged to describe the lady he sought. The doorkeeper looked at him sharply but said he had not seen any such person enter.

"You might take a look, though," he suggested, flinging back the dooor.

A hot, fetid puff of air greeted Brayton. He had one glimpse into the room with its garish appointments. He saw couples in flashy clothes and with easy manners sliding over the floor.

With a sudden access of common sense, he stood for an instant dumfounded at the notion he had entertained. It was impossible to think of Berenice in such a place.

Driven by his disgust, he went downstairs. Michael Finney looked at him with a hint of belligerence in his eyes.

"Find her, sir?" he asked.

"No, confound it!" Phelps grunted.

Finney got behind his wheel, grinning a bit. It was good to have the man-fool wake up to what he had dared to think of a superfine lady. He ought to look glum and to hurt inside.

Phelps slipped a bill with two numbers on it into Finney's hand. Finney grinned more. The gentleman was paying him in proportion to the size of the fault he wanted forgotten. They spun back to Brayton's house.

Phelps's eyes sought the front windows on the second floor. They were dimly lighted as when he left the house. The hope he had encouraged died.

Admitting himself with his latch-key, he looked at his watch. It was after one. If she were not at home now— He stopped thinking.

He hurried up-stairs, almost suspending even breathing as he approached her door.

He did not knock. Without realizing it, he had run half-way up the stairs. He entered her room in his overcoat and with his hat in his hand.

Berenice sat at her dressing-table.

The relief unnerved him. He stood with his back against the door and his hand clutching the knob. He looked at her without speaking.

She was in a charming negligee. She turned to him expectantly. He tried to greet her naturally. But he could not manage it. His heart thumped like a great hard ball in his breast.

She rose and took a step toward him. Something in him let go. He went toward her and gathered her in his arms with fierce possessiveness.

He held her in a crushing clasp that would have hurt. But his were lover's arms. She did not feel the pain. She lifted her lips. He kissed her again and again.

"Where were you, dear?" he asked at last.

"Waiting for you," she answered, and the quick flutter of her lids over the depths of her eyes indicated that tears were near.

"Where?" he asked.

"Here," she answered.

In the hungry rapture of the moment before, he had felt rather than seen her beauty. Now his eyes drank it. Her dark hair was ruffled into soft freedom. The pale yellow of her gown was lined with pink made richer by the color of her flesh. She was soft and warm and wonderful.

"Berenice!"

The fear of losing her seemed to crush itself into the syllables of her name as he spoke it. She looked at him, plainly startled.

"Where were you hiding, dear?" he asked.

"I wasn't hiding," she exclaimed.

"Berenice, I came home two hours ago!"

The words seemed to tremble and hang in a heavy silence which they created. She stood very still, as if they had robbed her of power to speak or move.

"Where were you?" he asked tensely.

"I—I was out," she replied hesitatingly, but not with fear.

"Out! At eleven o'clock!"

She made no reply.

"Berenice, you never go out alone. You know how it would alarm me to have you do it. You have been sheltered all your life. What possessed you to go?"

"I had to go," she said, with a composure that amazed him.

In spite of his effort to keep a firm hand on his feelings, they were becoming chaotic. He wondered what spirit of adventure or of curiosity could have moved her. Then he knew that no such spirit could have dominated the woman who now answered him with such poise.

Even the agony he had endured did not disturb her.

"Berenice, you do not appreciate what this means to me," he exclaimed, his voice heavy with tumult.

"I do, Phelps."

To his surprise, her clear eyes lifted to his. Her soft lips were firm. Hers were no haphazard reply.

"Berenice, you cannot realize what you are saying! The women of the Brayton family do not go about as if they were the wives of storekeepers!" he protested.

"A Brayton would have been the first to blame me if I had not gone!" she answered quickly.

But the next instant she was in the verge of a protest of another kind. Sheltered as she had been, she thrilled with a sense of the equality of people. Her exclusiveness had never made her snobbish. She hated the evidence of it in her husband's words. It had never been revealed before.

She knew he was proud, intensely proud. But she had always thought of that pride as a fine reverence for the integrity of his family, for its truth to a high standard. Now, in his anger with her, he seemed to reveal an un-American spirit. It was hard to believe that he could entertain such ideas.

"Phelps, it's something to be proud of, the way four generations of Braytons had made great fortunes honestly. It's something to be proud of that the men of the family have not used their prestige to cover license. Most of the Brayton women have been beautiful. All of them have been good. I am proud to be one of them. But I don't consider any one of us as inherently any better than the wife of a storekeeper who respects herself and behaves with dignity!"

Brayton looked at her as if he could hardly believe her. What she said sounded to him simply like a veiled defense of what she had done. She had taken some unwonted liberty. She had defied the conventions of her family and her class. She was merely hiding behind this elaborate pose.

"Suppose any friend of ours saw you out at night without me!" he exclaimed.

"Suppose some friend of yours did! He would probably think that at last one Brayton woman had broken the silly restrictions that you seem to think should surround them."

She spoke with biting directness. She meant what she said. But Phelps, with his mind on her extraordinary action, heard nothing except her effort to evade explaining herself. It was forced upon him that she meant to conceal where she had been and what she had done.

"Aren't you going to tell me?" he asked sharply.

The crude harshness of the question brought her amazed eyes to his. She regarded him in wonder. His face was flushed. He was very angry.

"Well?" he insisted.

"No, Phelps, I am not going to tell you."

"Not going to—"

He broke off suddenly. Perhaps the strength of his love converted itself for the moment into the brute strength that clenched his hands as though he crushed something in their mighty grip. It was almost beyond endurance to see her sit there before him, defying him, as if her slender body were wrought of steel. He had never before realized her kind of strength. It astounded him; it mystified him.

"Berenice, do I understand—do you really mean that you will not tell me?" he asked, his voice hoarse.

"Yes, Phelps."

If she was torn by conflicting emotions as he was, she did not betray it. She kept her face turned from him; but her hands lay at ease in her lap and her feet did not tap the floor with nervousness.

It was incredible. Her calm acted like a goad. It drove him to an effort. He must break through this exterior and find something familiar about this new Berenice.

"Why will you not tell where you have been?" he asked tensely.

"I—cannot."

"Cannot?" he protested.

"I may not, then," she corrected.

"There is nothing a wife may not tell her husband," he said quickly.

"That is not true," she answered quietly.

"You mean that I have no right to know what you do?" he demanded.

"Not when it involves—not when there is some one else to be considered," she replied slowly, as if she chose her words.

"I ought to be considered first!" he asserted hotly.

"You are—in matters that concern you."

He approached this incomprehensible woman. His eyes bored into hers as if he hoped to read some explanation of her madness.

Suddenly a question leaped from his lips.

"You have promised some one that you will not tell me?"

"I have. I'm sorry, Phelps. But I will not break my word."

He saw that she was moved. Regret was in her voice. But for all that he could detect no sign of wavering in her intention. He looked at her with eyes at once angry and unbelieving.

"What kind of a person would ask a wife to do—"

Her dark eyes flashed a warning glance at him. She rose and walked away the length of the room.

"It ought not to be necessary for me to say that I am not deceiving you," she observed.

"What else is it?" he exclaimed.

"I have told you nothing but the truth. Because I cannot tell you everything, you accuse me of deceiving you. Really, Phelps, you almost put a premium on lying. It would have been much easier for me to say that I was lonely without you and went to —to—"

"To where?" he interrupted when she hesitated. "That's just the point. You do not go to the homes of our friends without me. Where could you go?"

She flung herself down in a chair, weary of the return of the conversation again and again to one point. He was staring at her in morose silence when a lurid thought leaped in his brain. He started; it hurt him so poignantly.

She had been away during his absence—with a man. What else could prompt such secrecy? What else would she not have told him under the stress of his questions? That, that was the only explanation of her act that she would die rather than make. The structure of his life toppled and clattered down about him. Berenice had risen and moved nearer the fire. The light blent its rose and gold with the softer tones of her gown. Above, her bare shoulders and slender white neck rose alluringly.

"Berenice! for God's sake—"

He stopped. Love was caught in the hard hand of pride.

"I tell you I have a right to know!" he said dominantly.

"Phelps, I assure you it need not worry you. You would approve. I give you my sacred word—"

"I approve of nothing you do that you dare not tell! It looks as if you had waited for my absence to do what you are ashamed of!"

He saw the shiver that went over her in the trembling of the chiffon and the glints of light that shot from the beaded tassels on her negligee.

"I—am—sorry—" she said, her hands pressed together.

"You need only be frank. You could trust my love—"

"But you do not trust mine!"

The reproach cut in sharply. Her voice was higher than its usual charming pitch. He knew in a flash that she suffered. His anger died in the sweep of his love. Obedient to the impulse, he went toward her. His stalwart frame offered its strength to her feminine delicacy. She was in his arms.

The warm wonder of her thrilled him. He felt her wet lashes touch his face. Her breath came to him, sweet and quick. The clasp of her small hands was very close.

They stood there, miserable, ecstasied. To him it seemed impossible that she could withhold her confidence when she gave herself with such exquisite abandon.

"Darling, tell me everything!" he whispered, with his lips against her hair.

"I cannot."

Low as it was, breathed so he could scarcely hear, her refusal was overwhelming. It was unbelievable. In this embrace the thrill of his being mingling with hers she could still refuse. His arms fell from around her as if forced away.

For a long while they faced each other in silence. It was as if they measured souls. Then rage hurtled through him in dynamic throbs of pain.

He stepped back. She sensed the meaning of his withdrawal. He would not trust her. She turned away, going rather waveringly toward her bed.

"I am tired, Phelps. Good night."

She dismissed him. The poison of it went through him. She was so plainly in the wrong. She dictated to him, the injured one.

Whirling, blind with wrath, he went toward his own door. He fought himself to keep from speech. He hurled himself through the door. She heard the key grate as he turned it in the lock.

For a second she looked as if she could not credit her own senses. Then she started toward the door, her hands extended, her face beseeching. But she never reached the barrier. She paused, turned slowly as if her body resisted the dictate of will and pride, then sank into a chair.

He had locked the door between them.

CHAPTER III.

LONG, BITTER HOURS.

BRAYTON sat down stiffly in a chair just inside the door. The noise of the key, turned by his own hand, had cleared his mind of thoughts of himself. He sat there wondering about her. What was she doing? Had she heard the sound of the turned key? Did she care?

Would she set about the dainty details of her disrobing as if nothing unusual had occurred? He could almost believe it, recalling the calm of her refusal to confide in him. Then his tortured fancy began to picture her. She would call Elise. One white arm would be lifted while the chiffons warm with the warmth of her, were drawn off. Then, the other. Would she sit, looking, into the mirror without seeing herself in the exquisite undergarments she wore, dreaming and smiling? He had watched her do it innumerable times.

He saw the satin ribbons over her shoulders. The soft buoyancy of the ruffled edges of her skirt floated before him. He caught the dreaming eyes in the mirror, dreaming of him.

Phelps rose hurriedly. He was shut away from her. His own hand, manipulated by his pride and wrath, had closed the door against him.

Then he listened intently. She had not rung for Elise. There was not a sound from beyond the door. Did she want to be alone to fight thoughts that tormented her? That could not be. She had only to knock, to call to him. He would come. Her con-

fidence was all that was needed to restore the paradise they had known.

It seemed so simple to him. And because it did seem so and she did not make an effort to carry out the program, he began to imagine how much must lie behind her absence from home. She dared not tell him, lest he discover too much. If her evening had been innocently occupied, she could not in mercy have let him endure the agony he suffered. Did she love him? Could she love him and allow him to be tortured? If she did not love him, how had she given him the flawless days and nights of joy that he had known with her?

Deeper and deeper suspicion gnawed into him. Where had she been? What had she done? And who was the partner whose identity she covered? He leaped up, stung by the thoughts that flooded his mind. He was in torment—jealous.

His belief that the glory and grace of her beauty was dedicated to him, as sacredly as true priestess ever devoted herself to the deity she served, was dead. Its loveliness measured the hideousness in which he plunged. By the very contrast of what had been, he suffered the misery of what now was.

He plunged back and forth along the length of his room, finding no surcease in action for the thousand agonizing thoughts festering in his brain. At last he paused in his wild pace. He stopped close to the door. He listened.

At first he heard nothing. Then a sob that would not be restrained came to him. He turned the key savagely. He crossed the threshold.

Berenice leaped upright from beside her bed and stood facing him. His hope rose as he saw the indentation made by the pressure of her body against the mattress. She must have been on her knees.

"Berenice, why do you not tell me and spare us both this agony?" he exclaimed.

She stood before him perfectly still and very pale. The silk of her nightgown dragged in lines like marble over her round breast and hips. Her hair hung in two long black braids down over each shoulder. Phelps stood six feet one and in the unrelaxed correctness of his evening clothes; but for an instant he had a feeling of dwindling before this straight, strong young creature in whom he scarcely recognized the girl who had been his wife for two years.

"You should not ask me to prove my loyalty to you by disloyalty to another," she said in a voice so clear and sweet and curiously distant that he felt the paralyzing fear with which the threat of loss by death makes itself felt.

"Your first duty is to me," he tried to say judicially.

"It is. But fidelity to this promise does not jeopardize anything that is yours."

Phelps's revulsion of feeling was sharp and ugly. He laughed. What she said seemed so preposterous. His laugh was like a goad. She started visibly.

"I am a person even if I am your wife!" she flung at him hotly. "What does it all amount to that we promise to love and honor each other, if we cannot see that each of us has an individuality? It has its rights. Why did we say we would love and honor if it were not certain that a time would come when we must do that at all costs? You must trust me. I have told you that—"

"We're talking like book-folks. I'm a man. You're the woman I married, the woman I love with every atom of my mind and body, and the woman whose confidence I will have or—"

She watched him with eyes too deep for him to read. He saw the one gasp of fright that wrenched her lips before she could control herself and control them. He almost gloried in it as an evidence of what he was beginning to doubt—that she cared.

"Phelps, surely you do not doubt that I love you—as much as you love me?" she said, taking a step toward him that seemed the beginning of a flight into his arms.

But he was unyielding. He stared at her with hard, fascinated eyes, just as a patient about to undergo an operation might look at the polished and perfect knife that would cut him.

"You have a singular way of showing it," he said coldly.

He saw the blood flame into her pale cheeks. He saw her lips burn red. He saw the angry fire of her eyes.

"Which is the singular way of showing love—by doubting me as you do, or by being true to a duty, as I am?" she asked almost fiercely.

"How do I know but that you are covering up some man's—"

It was perfectly plain to him that she had not guessed the climax of his doubt of her.

"You mean you think I was—away from home—with some man?" she asked breathlessly.

"That is the one thing a wife would refuse to tell her husband!" he asserted bitterly.

She made no reply. She did not even hear him. She was trying to summon her thoughts to face this accusation, so utterly unexpected. Her body appeared to succumb to the strain; or her complete absorption in her thought made her careless, for she sank against the bed and dropped her head on the coverlid.

Her action looked like the acknowledgment of guilt. To Phelps she seemed to wilt under the searing heat of his knowledge of her fault.

"You paid that taxi-driver to keep still!" he accused.

"I paid him to—" She hushed her wondering repetition of his words.

"You didn't tell Elise you were going out. You dressed yourself and went away secretly. You needn't have done that unless you were ashamed of what you were doing."

"So you have questioned a man in the street about me? You have let my maid know that you do not trust your wife?"

Her anger was roused at last. It was the anger of a woman who had never realized how powerfully the flood of her wrath might bear her along.

Brayton opened his lips to explain that he had spared her in his questions to Elise and to the chauffeur. He had been careful not to sacrifice her dignity or his own.

But she swept in front of him, refusing to alter her course in deference to his position. The swirl of faint fragrance from her caught him in its wreath. The flush of her flesh through the white silk smote his eyes.

"Phelps Brayton, I never want you to speak to me again! You have dishonored me. I thought I knew the man I married, but I was mistaken. You doubt me first. Then you accuse me of not knowing what is due my position as your wife. And you prove your own realization of what is due me by—questioning servants about me!"

"But you make no explanation!" he exclaimed, cold and hot in the grip of contending emotions.

"Then it is because none is needed."

She picked up a robe, edged with ermine, from the back of a chair. She slipped into its warm folds. It gave him the impression that she meant to sit up long, canvassing the frightful situation.

He stood uncertain. She paid no attention to him, going to the chaise-longue and adjusting the pillows. He watched her sink into them, dropping her chin in her hand and fixing her gaze on the flames.

His presence was undesirable. That was what she meant to convey. He would show her how promptly she would be relieved of him. He strode toward his own door. Without a word he crossed the threshold and closed the door. But he did not turn the key.

He was sore, sore in mind and soul. The unbelievable had become the actual. He tried to think calmly and succeeded only in feeling desperate.

Had he misjudged her? Was she right to look at him with the scornful eyes of a young goddess, outraged by the presumption of a former worshiper?

Who was the man she was shielding?

Every thought but that was annihilated. He was back at the crux of the matter. Nothing but just that mattered so much that she would have endured what she had. Probably she suspected that he would kill the man. His hands ached to get at him.

It was possible that the man meant nothing more to her than a brief interlude in the domestic drama that had so engrossed her. But she had done what she should not, and was afraid of the consequences, so she—

He swore at himself for shielding her. She loved the man who had tempted her to take advantage of her husband's ab-

sence. She had tired of the devotion to which she had grown accustomed. She wanted new excitements. This shrewd devil who had learned of his absence had lured her into that for which she was secretly anxious. If he could get his damned neck in the hard grip of his hands--

Brayton found himself throwing off coat and waistcoat, unconsciously obedient to habit. The very fact that he could drift into the old ways when his world was newly made of pain and deceit and cankering doubt angered him. He got back into waistcoat and coat.

Then his eyes fell on a picture of Berenice taken in her wedding gown. It was a wonderful picture. Into the big, deep eyes the serenity of wifehood had not yet come.

Now he groaned as he looked at it. And suddenly, as if he were moved by another spirit than the devil of turmoil and torment that possessed him, he had seated himself at his desk and wrote:

"Berenice, I cannot bear being apart from you. Forgive me," he wrote, almost as if his pen tore at the wall that had risen between them, body and soul.

He folded the paper once and stood with it in his hand. The clock chimed two. He heard its companion in her room tell the same hour. Never before had the little clocks talked through a closed door.

He stepped softly to the door and thrust the white paper under it. Then he steeled his mind against thinking, deliberately undressed, and went to bed.

But an hour later he was stretched as taut as ever on the rack of his jealousy. He rose, sat looking at the corner of the little love-note. He fought himself. The part of him that counted most cried out that he leave the small peacemaker to accomplish its work. She must find it in the morning at least. It would let her see how immeasurably he yearned for her. And, in the seeing, she must realize the torture he endured because of her refusal to allay his fear.

Suddenly he felt moisture at the corners of his eyes. The discovery was like a hot little whip. It set the whole hurt quivering. It wrought him to disgust at his own softness.

What a consummate fool he was not to realize that the beauty he loved was the very lure that had urged some man in his advances. Its effect on another besides himself had fascinated her. She had let the intoxication blind her to dearer interests.

He sat up. He dashed at the small white bit of paper. He was afraid it might disappear under the door—another proof to her of her power over him. He dressed in a frenzy, stopping only once. That was when he tore the little note to pieces.

Then he stood facing a trying situation. He must do something. He could not bear inaction and more chance to think. But what to do?

He seized a warm coat, snatched a cap from his closet, and rushed down-stairs. He was turning from his own door when a thick voice called, "Texi, sir? Texi?"

He called. The black vehicle whirled up to the curb.

"Where to, sir?" Finney asked as if he were not wondering.

But, in spite of himself, he whistled softly when he heard the address to which he was to go.

CHAPTER IV.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

"WAIT, sir?" Finney asked, as his fare sprang out on the pavement.

"No."

Finney started off. He looked with considerable interest at the handsome entrance and the unlighted second floor of the house at which he had stopped. He looked at it as if he had seen it before, but now, for some especial reason, wanted to see it more accurately.

Then, as if moved by a thought that demanded instant action, he sent his car forward at a limit-breaking speed. In less than ten minutes he was back at his stand and climbing down from his seat.

Half-way across the street toward the Brayton house he appeared to think better of his course. But second thought did not change it. He went on, marching up the front steps with the do-or-die precision of

the leader of a desperate charge. He rang the bell with a vigor that sounded its command through the mansion's night-stilled elegance.

He had to wait for the butler to come from a place far from the front door. His courage oozed. Who was he, Michael Finney, to be digging a swell butler out of his blankets at three in the morning?

But the beacon that had led him did not burn less bright. He stood his debatable ground with its beams warming the uneasy heart of him.

The butler thought he was drunk. Then he thought him crazy. But finally he gave in before the insistence of Michael Finney, so powerful is the force of a great idea.

"Man, she'll—she'll—"

"No, she won't! She'll thank you to the end of her life for knowing a man with an important bit of news when you see him. Just you go and tell her it's the taxi-driver from over the way that's got something of importance to say to her."

A good many people believe with a kind of fainting faith that a great idea has dynamics of its own. Belief would have waxed strong could they have seen Berenice Brayton, at three in the morning, coming down her own front stairs to meet Michael Finney in the lower hall.

She had heard Brayton's noisy exit from his room. She had listened with the taut nerves of a woman sensitized by fear and love.

The slam of the front door had reached her. In her nightgown and bare feet she had run to the front window of the sitting-room and had seen him get into the taxicab and drive off.

Now the driver wanted to speak to her, and, regardless of the hour, she came straight to hear his message.

Finney caught his breath with a slight noise. He had never seen her so ideally the lady of his dreams. She seemed to him to float down in a blue bit of heaven, and her big startled eyes shone on him with the pure gleam of stars.

"What is it?" she asked fearfully.

"It's not much! That is, he's not dead or anything like that. But he's gone to the house where you went; and I thought you ought to know so you could be—be ready for what he might—find out."

Finney stumbled miserably. Life had shown him the seamy side too generously. He had come with the instinct of one who saves his own ideal. For Brayton and his beautiful wife were like the characters in a favorite story—a story he wanted to turn out right. They were all Finney had in his world of imagination.

Probably if he had never seen them, he could never have reached such heights as to picture them. They were the almost unbelievable. Brayton was such a big, clean, upstanding, self-sufficient man that he moved in the time and manner of a king, to the Irishman's notion. And the lovely lady who went and came from the big house, who wore on her breast the violets that were the king's love-knots, who even smiled at Finney when their eyes met on a sunny day, was Finney's picture of a young queen. He had come that he might keep his fairy kingdom from being destroyed.

But Finney was just an Irish taxi-driver. He knew his king was a man and his young queen a woman. He knew a pathetic amount of what men and women may do at wrong times and inopportune moments. He first thought that the young queen had done some such thing and that the king was dangerously near to catching her in it.

But, when the clear shine of Berenice's star-eyes poured its radiance over him, he stumbled and was ashamed. This queen had done no wrong.

All the same, she had in those clear eyes the gift to see what was in a man's heart instead of what came from his blundering lips. She thanked him for telling her as if a great sweet wave of gratitude swept through her heart and rose by way of her voice and her eyes to make him understand.

She asked him kindly if he always stayed so late at his post. And he told her his was a night job.

"Then you are a kind of watchman for us!" she said.

It was not the words themselves so much; it was the wonderful implication behind them. Finney moved toward the door

as if he had been newly invested with responsibility. It brought the best of him so near the top that it actually showed in his lifted head and squared shoulders.

She bade him good night and then changed it to good morning as she glanced at the clock. And she offered him no money. He moved down the steps as a knight goes from the woman who has placed her sacred honor in his keeping.

Big ideas for Finney! He probably could not have said a word to tell how thoroughly they permeated his being. But they were there. And the woman who inspired them was bigger than they, growing out into her larger self along the route of suffering.

Berenice turned and went up-stairs. The look on her face would have been hard to read. Tenderness and purpose were so blended in it.

Meanwhile, Phelps Brayton had found a confidante. He had almost battered a way to her.

"*Madame*, it is Mr. Brayton," her maid had come to say after a parley in the hall with the butler, who was in turn energized to his efforts by a Brayton who paced the drawing-room and almost shouted his orders.

"Mr.—Brayton!"

The woman in the bed said it with patent amazement. Then fear rose in her surprised eyes.

"It can't be!" she asserted; but the words had the significance of "it must not be."

"But, *madame*, it is. He says he must see you!" the maid answered.

"Tell him I am very sick!" the mistress commanded.

The maid took the futile message. Mr. Brayton, usually of calm and elegant demeanor, almost drove her back to her mistress with word that he must see her in spite of everything.

With a sigh that was almost a groan, Susanne saw her mistress bury her head in her lace-covered pillow. Her shoulders shook. She was crying.

"*Madame*, if it disturbs you so much, he will—"

"He won't! He isn't that kind!" the mistress sat up to say with rebellious precision. "Give me a robe—a warm one!"

She shivered into the fleecy folds of the gown. She snuggled her aristocratic face down into the fur of the collar and caught the big fur cuffs close over her slim white hands. It almost seemed as if the man she could not evade sent a chill of premonitory terror ahead of him.

But the image, the chill, self-sufficient image of Phelps Brayton she had in her mind was very far from the truth of what he looked now.

All her preparations for his advent were curiously those of a person who anticipates being frozen. She kept tucking herself in all the rippling edges of her negligee, till she was almost mummylike when Phelps appeared at the door.

He stepped inside and closed the door sharply. Gradually she emerged from her sheath, emerged in sheer wonder at the difference in his aspect from his normal appearance.

"Phelps! What's the matter?" she asked, frightened, torn from her consideration of self by the magnitude of the wrongness she saw in him.

"I had to come, Isobel! I couldn't stand it without some one to talk to!" he cried out in agonized intensity.

The resemblance between the two of them was evident—more evident than it had ever been in their lives. His serenity, his self-satisfaction, had never been obnoxious, but—it had been very complete. While under the high-bred features of his sister, there could be traced the small signs of yearnings for what she had not, and of discontent with the almost perfect position of a Brayton. She looked beyond the ideal confines and longed for greater freedom. A discerning person would have seen it.

So now the unwonted tempest in his face made them more alike than mere likeness of feature ever had.

"Berenice?" she whispered.

The uttering of the name might have meant one of several things. Back of it a great fear seemed to crouch. But it meant to him but one thing.

"She—she's made everything—impossi-

ble!" he said vaguely, but with terrific meaning, nevertheless.

"What—do you mean?" Isobel asked.

"She's broken up everything! She's been out of my house, somewhere, with some one. She will not tell. She makes absurd remarks about my trusting her. Good Lord! How can a man trust a woman who is deceiving him at the very instant she asks for his trust?"

It was perfectly evident that Phelps Brayton had not come to his sister to ask advice or even comfort. He wanted an escape vent. She crouched on her couch, watching him with a half-stupefied amazement. He was a new man to her. She had always feared his perfection, his being so ideally an ideal Brayton. The yearnings in her own nature she had hidden as if they were criminal, because they were absolutely at variance with the Brayton schedule which he so admirably sustained.

"But, Phelps, lots of the women we know go about with absolute freedom. Margery Van Vester told me that she frequently—"

"So you're bitten by it!" he sneered. "What kind of a person is Margery Van Vester to offer as an example of what a Brayton should do. She has always been—"

"She's been an individual, Phelps. She hasn't been chained by a set of notions to a code that is purely—"

"She's been as nearly fast as even a woman of her birth could manage and not be ostracised."

She had bumped her head against the brick wall of Phelps's ideas too many times to bruise herself needlessly. And she was afraid of him. There was about the way in which he lived true to his ideals a certain fineness and firmness that made her silly little reellion seem the mere outcropping of a common nature hid beneath the Brayton aristocracy.

"You cannot mean, Phelps, that you think Berenice would do anything—actually wrong?" she asked timidly, after she had listened a long time to the outpouring of his tumultuous thoughts.

"I—then why can't she tell me where she was, and with whom?" he asked, the pain in his heart vibrating like an aching tooth.

Isobel's lips parted. Her blue eyes widened. Then, as if a brief strength to oppose him had been withdrawn, she settled back in a crushed relaxation among her cushions.

"I tell you I can't stand it! I can't go on suspecting that my wife is having an affair with some man who can sneer at me secretly. I've got to know the truth; and if she will not tell, it's the end of things between us."

Isobel started up as if she had been energized by an electric shock. She stood beside the couch, queerly twisted in the folds of her robe but with a look of power about her that was unusual.

"Phelps! Don't talk nonsense! The Braytons do not do things like that!"

Brayton's eyes closed and opened spasmodically as if he had received a blow across them. From his sister's lips were coming the preachments he was accustomed to expound.

"I can't stand it!" he exclaimed.

"What can you do?" Isobel exclaimed. "Other Braytons have had their domestic troubles; they stood them. You have been the one to insist that they should. You have preached self-sacrifice rather than tarnish the family standing. You have never allowed any of us to feel like human beings. We just have to keep remembering that we are Braytons. Now it is your turn to take the medicine!"

"Why doesn't Berenice make a clean breast—" he began.

"You insult her by doubting her. You are not the only one who has pride," Isobel interrupted.

"She refuses to confide in me! That tells me that what she has done is wrong and humiliating to me!" he said with savage insistence.

He started to go. Isobel caught his arm.

"Listen to me, Phelps! If you do what you have threatened, you will be the most humiliated Brayton that ever lived!"

But Brayton took no notice of her excited words. He left her and hurried out of the house. He walked rapidly to his own house. Back in his room, he frowned

at the door between him and Berenice. The woman beyond it had suddenly become a mystery. And she was dragging his pride in the dust while she kept him in ignorance of the man who was usurping his place.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRAP CLOSES.

ISOBEL saw him go with sinking heart. Her appeal to his pride of family was futile. She knew he would rush home to Berenice. If he threatened to leave her, Isobel did not believe Berenice could keep her promise. She wrung her hands; her blue eyes were wide and dry. Her fear and humiliation were too deep for tears.

Suddenly she turned and ran to the telephone.

"Is this—is it you?" she asked feverishly when the connection was made.

"It is I, my beloved!"

"I must see you!" she said, repressing the warning that leaped to her lips.

"I'll be there in ten minutes."

Shame burned through her veins and flooded her cheeks with crimson. How dared he take such a liberty?

"No, no, to-morrow morning," she said hastily.

"Must I wait till then?" he persisted. "I can't sleep now. I'll be thinking of you and counting—"

"Oh, don't—not on the phone!" she begged.

She heard him laugh.

"On the phone or anywhere! Besides, the world's asleep. I can say it now. I love you! I love—"

She heard no more. She dropped the receiver on the hook. Her teeth bit into her lip; her hands clenched. An expression of fear came into her eyes.

The rest of the night Isobel was haunted by the fear of exposure. She could not sleep. Again and again when she became drowsy, she was startled awake by the frightful certainty that Berenice had told Phelps of her affair with Festus Wall. She was so thoroughly imbued with fear of her brother's disapproval that she lay trembling, waiting for day. Then, at least, she would have a chance to make another effort to correct her folly.

Festus Wall was announced at ten. Isobel came from the luxurious corner where she had waited. She did not show the effects of her sleepless night. Indeed, it seemed to Wall that her blue eyes burned with a fire of welcome he had never seen in them.

"You want me!"

He said it with a note of triumph. He stood beside her, looking at her with a possessive glance.

Isobel evaded his nearer approach. The confidence of his manner grated on her.

"Come into the library. We'll be alone."

He followed her eagerly. He drew the velvet curtains close. For a moment he watched her in anticipation.

"Go on. Say it, Isobel!" he urged when she did not speak.

She looked at him quickly, fire in her blue eyes. But she restrained any expression of her feeling.

"When you spoke to me last night, I could hear it in your voice. Why not say it?"

"I asked you to come because—" she paused, and the color flew into her cheeks.

Wall crossed the short space between them. He caught her in his arms.

"Oh, don't, please!" she exclaimed. "I just sent for you because I want my brooch!"

"Isobel, I told you—"

"But I must have it. Mrs. Brayton and I have planned to wear them first to the Marlford ball. If I go without mine, Phelps will ask questions and everything will come out!" she said, losing her poise.

It was impossible for her to mistake Wall's expression. He was pleased.

"See here, Isobel, this is the appointed time to let him know. You say you love me. When I urged you to prove it by marrying me quietly, you lost your courage. Your overshot family pride and your brother's dictatorial possession of you were obstacles too big to be overcome."

"But he—controls everything!" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"He doesn't control me!" Wall answered

quickly, drawing himself to his slender height while the light in his dark eyes burned.

It was in just such moments that Festus Wall appealed to Isobel. She had been reared and married according to a schedule adopted by the Braytons before she was born. He had drifted across her path in the first days of her freedom from her punctiliously observed mourning. His talk of the right of every human to be an individual had sounded fresh and inspiring.

But now the new charm faded before the old fear. If Phelps ever suspected her affair with Festus Wall—

The very thought terrorized her to new efforts.

She summoned the delicate coquetry which, in a high-bred way, she had perfected. She knew that he was keenly sensitive to her influence.

"Festus, can't you understand that it would be foolish to antagonize my brother? He is the head of our family. We all defer to him. He is used to it. When we want anything that we suspect he will not approve, we arrange to get him gradually used to the idea. I can—"

"You cannot continue to use your beauty and your independence and your position at my expense," he said firmly. "You have carefully concealed our love for each other. Nothing unconventional has appeared on the surface."

"There has been nothing—unconventional!" she exclaimed defensively.

"Not last night?" he asked softly. "You liked it, Isobel!"

Her lips trembled. Her eyes fell. He leaned toward her suddenly; and his lips swept hers in the merest shadow of a kiss.

"You—you must not!" she warned, moving away from him.

"You let me kiss you last night," he said with gentle bravery. "Do you think it's fair to make a man love you? Do you think it's fair to refuse him because he wasn't born in your set and hasn't as much money as your father and your husband left you?"

Wall's agreeable voice was low and kind but full of reproach. He seemed immensely sincere.

Isobel flushed. She was confused in a way he did not fathom. At one moment she suspected him; the next she believed in him. And through it all ran the undercurrent of self-reproach. She had left the safe harbor of the conventions; and she was eager to get back. The terrors of the freedom she had tried to take were too great.

Her white skin was charming with the soft flush under it. Wall's eagerness grew.

"I managed to break down your absurd reserve last night," he said confidently.

He saw her look of uneasiness. His voice was firm and his eyes daring as he continued:

"You can't deny it. I have the evidence. You can't crawl behind your chilly air of conventional imperviousness. You can't pretend that I have not enjoyed lover's privileges. No, Isobel, not even if you will not come out bravely and acknowledge that you love me!"

"Oh, please give it back to me!" she implored.

The plea might have reached any man's heart. It had the direct persuasiveness of a child's prayer. But Wall came nearer, took her hands in his, and laughed at her.

"Not till you marry me."

Isobel stared at him in wonder and fright.

"You don't really mean that you will keep the brooch—" she began.

"Listen, my beloved," he said persuasively. "There are no objections that cannot be overcome."

"But I—I—the brooch is mine. It belongs to me. And I must have it!" she exclaimed.

"You gave it to me," he said, his brilliant eyes narrowed and his lips straightened into hard lines as he finished speaking.

"I did not!" she denied.

"Doesn't it amount to that? You let me unpin it from your gown when your head rested on my shoulder. You can't pretend that you didn't know what I did!"

"I didn't suspect you were the kind of a man who would take advantage of such—such an expression of confidence!" she retorted.

"Isobel, I'd take advantage of anything —to win you! I want you, darling!"

"You don't suppose I would marry a man who dares to—to—"

The frenzy of her anger suddenly left her. She saw too clearly. She could only contemplate the facts that faced her. The madness of the night before was horribly apparent.

What she had known intuitively the night before she now saw proved. She had sent for Berenice after Wall left the house with the precious brooch. She had asked her sister-in-law to help her keep Phelps ignorant of the loss of his gift until she had a chance to secure it. But she knew now that her desperation then had been the result of anticipating what had actually happened. Wall did not intend to return the brooch till he had secured his own end.

Wall had not answered her. He stood looking at her till she could have screamed.

"Your elegant brother might see the advantage of treating me fairly," he observed.

"I can't have him know that I have encouraged the attentions of—"

She stopped, aghast at her own tactlessness. But Wall did not retaliate.

"He needn't know. No one need know. You have only to come with me now and be married. Then you may have your brooch, wear it at the dance, and—tomorrow you will be mine!"

As if the prospect filled him with exuberant happiness, Wall came toward her with extended arms and flaming eyes.

"I—will—not!"

Pale, her wrathful blue eyes borrowing the blackness of their lashes, her charming figure drawn up and quivering, she looked the defiance that her words voiced.

"I'm not going to be browbeaten into marrying an adventurer. Oh, I see it now! You have a valuable ornament that belongs to me. You know that it has had a good deal of advertisement. You mean to keep it, to threaten me with exposure of how you came by it. You know how I dread publicity. You will play on that. But I will not marry—"

"Isobel! You force me to it! You are an intoxicatingly beautiful woman. You have encouraged me. It has thrilled me to know that you care, to feel that I have won where men of more wealth and greater position have failed. But you have not the courage to marry a nobody. You will not acknowledge that you have met your master. I have pride, too. I'm not willing to continue as your unacknowledged lover. I mean to be your husband."

The calm of his manner, the evenness of his voice, gave peculiar force to his words. She shivered as if their power froze her.

"You cannot love me! You would not treat me—" she began desperately.

"It is because I do love you that I insist upon my own terms," he said decisively. "You think it over and send for me when you come to my way of thinking. I'll leave you now, my Isobel!"

She watched him go, feeling as if she were caught in some invisible trap.

CHAPTER VI.

"I'LL STAND BY YOU."

FESTUS WALL left Mrs. Ellerton's house with an agreeable feeling of power. He had her where he wanted her. He confidently anticipated that Isobel would send for him before many hours passed.

A finely appointed limousine rolled up to the curb as he reached the pavement. A footman in fur sprang down and opened the door. Wall walked slowly. Berenice Brayton alighted.

"It's her sister-in-law," he told himself. "What wonders they are, these superlatively groomed and gowned women of wealth!"

He walked with his face lifted. The impression of Isobel and of Berenice affected him like fragrance. He seemed to inhale it while his eyes glowed with the fire which had won Isobel's attention.

His response to the effect of the two women revealed his true nature. He posed as a believer in the simple life. He assumed to scorn the complexity and the conventionality of society. His seeming difference from the men she knew had fascinated Isobel Ellerton.

As a matter of fact, he was an extreme

sensualist. He loved the luxury which surrounded rich Mrs. Ellerton. He loved the fineness of her skin, the lustrous beauty of her hair, the delicate arch of her small feet, every evidence of the perfection to which breeding and perfect care had brought her.

Just now he loved the thought that he held her in his power. Through her he gained importance. He thought with amused anticipation of the discomfiture of Phelps Brayton when he discovered that Festus Wall, nobody in particular and poor in the bargain, was his brother-in-law.

Berenice found Isobel crushed with her failure to secure the brooch. As she spoke, Isobel leaped up from the couch as if stung by a goad.

"You've come to tell me that you betrayed me! You couldn't hold out against Phelps!" she cried.

"I have—held out."

But in doing it, Berenice had robbed herself of something. She let her furs slip from her shoulders. Under the filmy softness of her gown her young body drooped. Even Isobel saw that she had exerted the last atom of power and was ready to give way.

"You—didn't tell him?" Isobel asked, as if she dare not believe.

Berenice shook her head wearily.

"You didn't—he can't even guess there is anything between me and Festus Wall?" Isobel questioned.

Berenice closed her hands as if she gripped at her self-control. A spasm of pain crossed her face. Isobel ran to her.

"Berenice, tell me, what is the matter?"

"He left home—without seeing me!" she whispered, as if the fact might assume a worse aspect if she voiced it. "It's the first time—"

Isobel did not penetrate the meaning of the words. All she saw was that her secret was preserved. But the relief was quickly lost in a new fear. Berenice had not been obliged to face her husband's questions. He had not made the threat which would open her lips.

"He didn't say anything about—leaving you?" Isobel interrupted.

"Leaving me?"

Berenice lifted to the height of her slender figure. Her weakness was gone. The blaze of her deep eyes from the purple shadows of pain frightened Isobel.

"He—he thinks you went out with—with a man—last night," Isobel explained, weakly.

"How dare he think that! How could he accuse me! Do you mean to hold me to my promise and let him think it?" Berenice demanded, her voice low, but so intense that Isobel trembled in its vibration.

"I—I can't tell him the truth!" she wailed.

For a second a look of wondering contempt quivered over Berenice's features. Then she saw reason for pity in the agitated lips and terrified eyes of her sister-in-law.

"Isobel, I came to ask you to release me from my promise," she said quietly.

"Oh! Berenice, give me time! I beg you to wait—just a—well, it can't be long! I've made such an utter fool of myself! But I can't bear to be found out. Just stick to me till I can get Festus Wall to give me the brooch!"

Berenice caught the hands Isobel extended imploringly. She looked deep into her eyes. She began to speak rapidly, anxious to say what she must.

"Isobel, I have thought and thought. I could not sleep. You cannot be so afraid of Phelps and what he may think of—of your affair with Festus Wall if you—if you have not gone too far!"

Isobel's blue eyes flared wide. She did not notice that Berenice was blushing with embarrassment and shame at the question she had asked.

"There! That's just it! Even you think I've done wrong. What would Phelps think? Look how he interprets your innocent action! He would condemn me. I never could make him believe that I hadn't."

Berenice stood looking down at Isobel. Her eyes were large and bright with the intensity of her regard. It seemed to Isobel that they searched her soul. She stood the scrutiny as long as she could. Then her head bowed.

"Isobel, are you sure—there was nothing—wrong?" Berenice asked slowly.

"Nothing. I swear it, Berenice."

"Then, why not tell Phelps the truth and spare me—"

Isobel interrupted Berenice sharply.

"Do you believe me? Do you believe that there was nothing between me and Festus Wall which you would condemn?" she asked.

For a long moment the two women looked into each other's eyes. Isobel realized that something was stirring in Berenice which was new and powerful. Before the bar of this new strength Isobel deliberately waited for judgment.

Suddenly Berenice's arms went round her. The brave, deep eyes glowed. She kissed Isobel softly on the forehead.

"I do believe you, dear."

Isobel's head rested on Berenice's breast. A thrill of security and sense of peace went through her as if it came from the loyal heart. It was strengthening to be believed by Berenice Brayton.

"But Phelps will not!" she suddenly remembered.

"It is the truth. He must," Berenice said intensely.

"You told him there was nothing wrong in what you did last night. It was the truth. Does he believe you, Berenice?"

The momentary exaltation passed. Berenice faced her trouble and saw how black and forbidding it was. The tears forced themselves between her lids, closed in a resolute effort to hold them back.

"Berenice, dear Berenice, don't think I am so selfish that I overlook your suffering! But you said yourself that the blow to Phelps's pride would be painful. You agreed that it was better not to let him know that I—I had acted like an idiot. Surely I can manage somehow to get the brooch. So please stick by me a little longer?" Isobel urged.

"You gave this Mr. Wall the brooch so he could examine it. And he kept it. You have little to hope from a man so lacking in honor," Berenice observed, wretchedly contemplating the difficulty.

"He'll give it to me—if I'll marry him," Isobel said grimly.

"*Marry him?*"

The horror and wonder with which Berenice spoke completely expressed the Brayton attitude. Having a man of Festus Wall's type as one of the family was unthinkable.

"You can't do that, of course!" Berenice said finally.

"Of course I can't. He wouldn't have me if he guessed how everything I have is tied up and in control of Phelps. I couldn't live on what he makes if he wanted me to try. So—isn't it a fine muddle?"

"Isobel, has he said that you could only have the brooch by marrying him?" Berenice asked.

Isobel nodded.

"Then, let him keep it!" Berenice exclaimed indignantly.

"Let him?" Isobel repeated bitterly. "I don't have to 'let' him. He *will* keep it."

"Not if Phelps—" Berenice began, thinking of the one to whom she had always turned.

"Phelps can do nothing — unless he wants to stir up a scandal! Festus will tell him that he unpinned the brooch when I—"

Isobel caught herself too late. Berenice looked at her questioningly.

"You said you gave it to him so he could look at it closely," Berenice said, guessing that she was being asked to help without having the facts made plain.

"I—lied. He unpinned it when my head rested on his shoulder. But that's the worst that happened. He kissed me and that!" Isobel explained, embarrassed.

Berenice drew away. Her young eyes grew hard.

"Isobel, you ask for my help and then you deceive me!"

"I have not deceived you. That is the whole truth. But it just shows how little it will be credited. Phelps would imagine things even worse than you. He knows more than you. All the rest of our set would — oh, well, I'll manage for myself — somehow!"

Isobel, bitter, angry, hopeless, started from the room. Suddenly she felt Berenice's strong, young arm around her.

"Isobel, you don't understand! I'm not distrustful about what you did. I believe you. But it's because you did not tell me the truth. You can't ask loyalty and not give honesty."

Isobel sank into Berenice's embrace, sobbing like a worn-out child.

"I've always been afraid to tell the truth. I've always told what a Brayton should do—even if I had done something else. I know I've behaved unbecomingly, just as well as if Phelps told me so. If he ever gets to know, he will torture me to the end of my life. He'll doubt me, suspect my intentions, believe I'll be bad if he doesn't watch me! It won't help in any way to have him know."

"He will not know."

The words fell like a cold shower on Isobel's excitement. She looked into Berenice's white face.

"Berenice! Berenice! What is it?" she whispered, frightened by what she saw.

"You spoke of Phelps leaving me. He must have talked of it to you. I came here determined to ask you to release me from my promise so that I could make it up with him. But I do not ask it. I will not make up with him in any way but one which preserves my self-respect and receives his respect. I'm not going to yield what I believe right just to—just to be back in my old place in his heart!"

The words came with difficulty. Isobel could not restrain her tears. But they were more for the suffering she was causing Berenice than on her own account. She saw how intensely Berenice loved her brother.

"Yes, you will, dear. We all do it. He'll make you—"

"He must trust me. I'm his wife. I have a right to his confidence. I have a right to stick to a friend who needs my loyalty," Berenice said, thinking deeply as she spoke.

"It's no use, Berenice. I wanted freedom. I tried to have it. This infatuation for Festus Wall was just the result of my wanting to be more than a puppet. That's what I am. A puppet moved by the set of strings that control us Brayton women. That's what you will be! You'll go home. Phelps will take you in his arms. He'll tell you there is no principle for a married woman but the one which her husband entertains."

Berenice shook her head. But Isobel rushed on her in her bitter outburst.

"He'll kiss you. You love him. He'll make you feel weak and stupid for believing in your right to be a person. And you'll tell him how you made the mistake. Lying in his arms, you'll tell all about me! Nothing will seem worth while but—him!"

As Isobel talked, Berenice felt the blood rush through her body and shock it with thrills and pains. She rose and began to move swiftly about the room. Her eyes burned, hot and dry. Her hands clasped each other till they hurt. With every word of Isobel's she knew how completely she had lived in her husband's love. The fear of losing it crushed like an icy weight on her heart. The fever in her blood chilled. White and still, she stared at Isobel.

"There! I knew it!"

It was a wail of despair, an acknowledgment that the worst was all she had to expect. Isobel turned and flung herself on the couch, sobbing uncontrollably.

For several minutes the desperate abandon to discouragement made no impression on Berenice. She stood with her eyes fixed on a vision that opened before her.

Isobel had grown up under the dominance of ideas not her own. She had made this wretched mistake because she had grown so weary of the limitations imposed on her. Berenice looked along the years. It seemed to her she saw her ideals dwarfed and her dreams unrealized, all because she was not allowed the freedom to be and do as her better self dictated. With a shock, she knew that Isobel was sobbing.

"Isobel! Isobel! Don't cry so, dear! Listen to me!" she coaxed, sympathy infusing tenderness into her voice. "Your folly was just a mistaken effort to be self-expressive. It's the fault of the Brayton code more than yours. Phelps is making his mistake, too. He has held you and is trying to hold me to what *he* thinks right. He forgets that we are able and ought to decide for ourselves. I decide right here and now. And I'll stick to my decision, whatever comes. I will stand by you!"

The fine lines of the lovely face grew firmer. The latent character began to chisel its finer and subtler graces into her features. Isobel gazed at her, wondering.

This was a new Berenice. A serene in-

tegrity lay deep in her lustrous eyes. The delightful chin was firm beneath its soft contour.

"You mean you will not tell—even if Phelps does as he threatens?"

Berenice's lips trembled, but her purpose was fixed.

"If Phelps leaves me because he will not trust me, he'll be happier away—"

"No, he will not!" Isobel exclaimed, half-frightened at what she had set in motion. "He loves you desperately."

"Not altogether, for trust and confidence are necessary to love," Berenice said with sorrowful certainty.

"Oh! if I just had that brooch!"

The exaltation of Berenice was like the detached loveliness of a martyr. It filled Isobel with a kind of fear. She knew she had stirred in Berenice something new and full of strength. She guessed that it might have momentous meaning in the affairs of her brother. She shuddered to think of what might happen. In her fright she turned to the concrete fact that was the very center of all her trouble.

Berenice's eyes met hers. They were silent as the significance of the absent jewel weighted them with misgivings.

Phelps had made a great deal of money by an unexpected rise in stocks. Jewel-lovers and jewel-sellers were very much wrought up over two wonderful pigeon-blood rubies that had been brought to New York. Brayton had bought the jewels. He had them set in two brooches and gave them to the two women he loved—his wife and his sister.

Both of them knew with what curiosity the appearance of the jewels was anticipated. If either of them appeared without her brooch, no end of questions must be asked. Worse than all, Phelps would be hurt at the carelessness of his princely gift. He would certain question Berenice, if not Isobel. There was no hope of escaping the consequences of Isobel's folly.

"Perhaps, if Mr. Wall knew that you would be cut off from the bulk of your money if you marry, he might give up the idea," Berenice suggested.

"But he won't give up the brooch!"

Isobel looked with disillusioned eyes at the man with whom she had been infatuated. Berenice, too, knew they had nothing to hope from him. He was an adventurer. It was scarcely likely he would return a very valuable jewel when he could keep it without unpleasant consequences.

He knew as well as they did that the loss would be endured rather than stir the scandal which he could start. He could play upon that terror till Isobel met his terms, or he could coolly keep the brooch.

Berenice took Isobel's cold hands. She held the shifting blue eyes by the steady look of her own.

"Isobel, think what I'm saying! Think carefully. I shall stand by you. I won't tell Phelps. We will find some way to excuse ourselves for not wearing the brooches to-night. That will give us time. But, this is the thing you must remember. You must not let your fear of Phelps or of exposure drive you to marry this—this creature!"

Berenice's delicate nostrils quivered with scorn. Her deep eyes burned with anger. Isobel shrank under the look. She was so utterly ashamed of her fascination for a man who stirred her contempt.

"You won't marry him, dear?" Berenice urged.

"It wouldn't help any!" Isobel exclaimed. "I've been a fool! But marrying him would be jumping from the frying-pan into the fire. If I could just get that brooch—"

Berenice rose. She gathered up her furs and flung her scarf over her shoulders. There was something energetic and inspiring in the action. For a moment she had forgotten her own trouble in her championship of Isobel.

Already she was making her plan. She would manage to excuse herself for not wearing the brooch. Isobel would not wear hers. Phelps might not notice. Perhaps no one would mention the non-appearance of the two rubies. Luck might favor her and Isobel to that extent.

Suddenly her breath caught and the tears started. She discovered that she was counting on the estranged relations between herself and Phelps to prevent his making any inquiry about her toilet. She went down

the stairs and toward the front door, gasping as if something almost strangled her.

It was impossible not to anticipate the increased estrangement between herself and Phelps if he thought she refused to wear his magnificent gift.

She sank back into the corner of her car and gave herself up to the gloomy thoughts of what was sure to come. But she did not for one instant entertain the thought of failing Isobel.

With her heart crying out for the love that was its life, with her beautiful face white and set with the stamp of suffering, she registered a vow that she would stick to what she believed right. Almost as if Isobel could hear, her lips shaped the words: "I will stand by you."

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 Wild Star

by Henry Leverage

THERE are cracksmen and cracksmen. There is the beetle-brow yegg who is half hobo and half venturesome. Then there is the professional who was once a machinist or a blaster. Perhaps he was crossed in love, or didn't believe in the sign: "Burglar Proof." He had become peeved at the safe-makers, and spoiled their finest designs.

This tribe had quite a time until the police and the "Pinks" of the middle West got busy and rounded them up.

The history of "gopher-work" is a long series of triumph and disaster. The safe-makers were confronted with the same problem that faced the armor-plate manufacturers—that which man had put together, man could tear apart. The race was long and keen till the time of the "cannon-ball," and the up-to-date balanced-relay protection. Then the "best in the world" started doing time with monotonous regularity, and the jig was up, save for the master minds.

It was for this reason that Calvin Cole swung aboard the limited for Chicago in search of a master mind. He had left that in Brookfield which was boiling and simmering, and was liable to destroy him. The energetic and painstaking district attorney nursed a safe full of papers, ready to spring an explosion that would rock the county, and fill the empty cells of the State prison.

Calvin Cole's name was on a number of these "bedplates," as he called them. Their existence spelled stripes for him.

He had considered the gathering storm from a score of directions. He could flee the county—there was time for that—but they would catch him as sure as they caught Tweed. Also, there was much in Brookfield worth holding. Brookfield was his home town. He had been born there. They had made him mayor. He looked the

part. One thing only he had overlooked. Honest men had slipped into high office, with a rebel yell of: "Turn the rascal out!"

They had enough on him to give him life and fifty years. A county clerk had turned informer; another henchman had made a confession, while a third had given the full details of a traction grab in a series of checks and vouchers that made for conviction.

This last was the item that worried Calvin Cole. The rest could be fixed. There was no getting away from the grab save the destruction of the papers in the case. He had started for Chicago with this in view. Surely, he reasoned, the daily reports of that town showed there were men capable of ripping the district attorney's safe into its component elements and touching a match to all that was compromising.

He carried ten thousand dollars with him to pay for this work. It was in large bills that could never be traced. The grand jury would sit within thirty days. His time was limited. He wanted a fast man with soup or a can-opener or an oxy-hydrogen blow-pipe—he didn't care which. The work had to be done by a master mind, for the bedplates were reposing in the last word of the safe-maker's art—a cannon-ball strong-box, inside of a network of alarms and patrolled protection.

There is a place in the Windy City named from an oil-painting: the Shower of Gold. To this saloon Calvin Cole made his way. It was flash and famous. The owner had often visited Brookfield. He had been dined and wined by the mayor. His name was Cragan—William Cragan. He had offered his services at any time for any work. He numbered among his patrons many that were left of the haute-underworld. He went their bail or bankrolled them, or bought such things as "stickers" or stones, after they were broken from incriminating settings. He had told Calvin Cole that he could furnish a man for anything.

The emphasis had been upon "anything."

The Mayor of Brookfield did not look like a man who had bedplates against him as he swung the ornate doors of the Shower of Gold and sauntered through to the bar. Rather, he looked like the picture of prosperity, garnished by a nose the color of an African sunset.

His porcine eyes gleamed from folds of fat in the manner of good nature and big dinners. The cane he carried with easy grace was gold-tipped. It had been a present from his loving friends of Brookfield. His portly paunch was covered with a *pot-pourri* of hues in the manner of Joseph's coat. The charm he wore upon his chain was the greatest little hand-shaker ever devised.

His entrance was the signal for action upon the part of the bartender. The pudgy hand that took the glass dazzled the place with a three-carat diamond. The bartender's eyes lifted. They met those of a tired-looking individual who sat at a little, round table. A signal flashed between them. The tired party rose and stepped over to the bar.

It was then that Cragan, the proprietor, came through the door. He saw the play and smiled. "Hello, Cal!" he lipped, motioning for the tired individual to take a back-step.

The Mayor of Brookfield swung on one rubber heel. His eyes twinkled as he held a hamlike fist out to his friend.

"Come over here," Cragan said cautiously. "Over this way, Cal. We can be served just as well here."

A whisper and an echo of the situation at Brookfield had floated Chicagoward. Cragan had heard of it. He reasoned that Cole would be around sooner or later. The mayor's last questions upon a former visit were those of a man who was in a labyrinth.

"What can I do?" asked Cragan, after a glance of caution.

"Get me a peterman, yegg-man, soup-man, gopher-man, dynamiter, or plain John Yegg. I want one—quick. I'm in a helova hole. They're goin' to indict me for a franchise grab. The bedplates are in a strong-box. The strong-box is in the D. A.'s office, up over the town jail. I want a yegg or a mob who will rip the place open, take those bedplates and light cigarettes

with them. I want to see their ashes. I'll put them in an urn fer remembrance."

"Easy, easy," lipped Cragan. "Easy is the word. I'll get all you want—at a price. But go easy."

"What 'll it cost?" asked Cole heavily.

"There's one man," went on Cragan, "for you. Just one I'd recommend. He's a gentleman-burglar—"

"A what?"

Cragan laughed.

"I'm serious," puffed Cole.

"He's the best out of jail," went on Cragan. "He'll lift your bedplates if anybody can—if it's in the power of man to do it. He took the Pasadena job, and he took the Richmond, Virginia, stickers, and he can take anything in the country, if you give him time and money."

"He's the man," Cole decided huskily, dropping his hand round a glass and lifting it to his pursed lips. "Bring him in!"

"He's in already. See that lad over there toying with a straw? That's him."

Cole took his time, then turned a bullet-shaped head upon a bullock-neck, and surveyed the cracksman.

His scrutiny was far from being satisfactory. Had Cragan told him the man in question was a "lounge-lizard" or a tango-instructor, he would have believed it. "Yegg" was not written there at all. He saw only youth and bland innocence, touched, as if by the city, with a cool veneer that might, possibly, hold a harder interior.

"Gawan!" exclaimed Cole. "You're kiddin'."

"Take it from me, I'm not. He's the captain of them all. The fastest man on a box that ever worked. He's the Mauve Mouse of the underworld. He's never done time, and he don't drink. The C. O. Dicks know him, and take their hats off to him. He's the man."

Cole was convinced. "What 'll this wonderful party want?" he queried.

"Give him enough."

"Five thousand?"

"Don't be a piker—if they got you right."

"Five down, then, and five when I get the bedplates. How'll that be?"

"He'll need help," mused Cragan. "He'll need two or three to take the box. The more noise they make about it, the better it will be. Make it ten down and ten on delivery. It's all or nothing for you. I'll handle the matter here, and send the Mauve Mouse down to look over the prospect."

Cole nodded, after thought, then jerked his head toward the bartender for service.

"It's a go," he announced throatily. "Tell your dude friend to get a room for a week out near Brookfield College—say at Professor Marr's place. The professor and his daughter run a sort o' select boarding-house for students and teachers. That's the best place, 'cause he won't be suspected there. I'll communicate with him. I'll show him the lay of the D. A.'s office, at the first chance. It ought to be nuts for him, if he's as good as you say."

"He's a helova lot better than that," chuckled Cragan as he reached under the table and took the packet Cole had been trying to hand him.

II.

THE Mauve Mouse, as Eddie Smith, went south the next day. He found the professor's just the place he was looking for, so he said. The books he draped about his room were on higher mathematics, and the parallelogram of forces—two subjects he could have held a degree upon.

His "rah-rah" alibi extended to hanging some college flags from the chromos on the wall, and propping a suit-case so that the "E. S." would loom large to the curious or the inquiring.

Satisfied with this, he tiptoed down the stairs and went out upon the campus. It was an old college. Its walls were covered with ivy. The Mauve Mouse glanced about him keenly. He shot a question up at the clock in a dark tower. It was near noon. He threw back his head and breathed the quiet air. The droning of the midsummer bees and the students at their tasks brought him back with a jerk to just such a scene in England—a memory of "gold-coast" days.

His eyes hardened to blued-steel. He turned and made his way back to the professor's. The students were filing out of the class-rooms as the clock struck twelve, slow strokes.

He was the first at the table. A girl came through the door for his order. He glanced up at her. Their eyes met. Hers dropped beneath long, brown lashes. A slight blush crept up her cheeks. It was as if the skin of a peach had been ruffled. He knew her to be the professor's daughter.

Cragan had stated that Brookfield paid its professors only eight hundred a year. It was for this reason the daughter was waiting on the table. The Mauve Mouse gave his order as if he had addressed a queen. He avoided her eyes. There was a hardness in his own, he knew, that was well worth covering.

She stood in the shadow of the room and watched him. No man or student had ever impressed her like the new guest. There was that to his actions that was never of any college world — a worldly grace, and a polish that contact with a thousand situations endows. She grew thoughtful, then sighed.

He took the last offering of the meal with a nod, then rose and bowed himself out through the door.

That night he met Calvin Cole. The mayor wasted no words. Things had developed during his absence that called for prompt action. The district attorney was on the job with both feet, and a mouth closed as tight as the suture of a strong-box. Cole was plainly worried as he drew the Mauve Mouse into the shelter of a hedge, between the college campus and a cranberry swamp. It was a quiet spot, but even there he was cautious.

"Who sent you?" he queried.

"I dropped down with a shower of gold," explained the cracksman from the corner of his mouth.

"All right, you'll do," said Cole heavily. "Now we'll get busy as Chinamen on a contract. Have you looked the job over?"

"By daylight—yes. What protection have they got at the court-house at night?"

Cole unreeled a string of facts. He had his quarters in the building, and had the details.

The prisoners were in the basement. The police station was on the main floor. The district attorney's suite, with the other city offices, was upon the second and third floors. The cannon-ball safe was in a fire-proof extension to the inner law-chamber. Two windows of this chamber overlooked a side street which was "deader than a graveyard," according to Cole.

"I'll look it over to-night," decided the Mauve Mouse. "Then I'll drop north and get two I know. You sit tight. Keep ten grand ready for me. I'll see you after the blow. Good night!"

The Mauve Mouse swung with quick decision. He crossed the campus to the professor's house. The girl was on the porch. She nodded to him.

He touched his hat. "Is supper ready?" he asked.

"Supper is over," she said, "but I've kept something for you. Won't you come in?"

Again she had caught the hard glitter in his eyes that had disconcerted her. It was a thing that worried. It was not of Brookfield. He followed her through the doorway, and ate in a silence which he broke by asking:

"Will you pardon me, but I don't know your first name. Your father's is Marr, is it not?"

"And mine is Helen," she said.

He rose and extended his hand. "Let's be friends, then—I may finish my studies here. I'm keen about this place. It's quiet and away from the world, isn't it?"

She nodded. He wondered what his life would have been had he met her ten years before. He knew she had no place in that boarding-house at all. She was for a better game. A city should know her. The knowledge that he was what he was would keep her from him.

And yet she wore her poverty with a high grace. She had helped her father to the limit of her ability. He rather concluded that no student of the college had interested her. The dream fire in her eyes was of other lands. Her hair would have enhanced any woman.

He went out with her in mind. When he returned, his step was soft and catlike. It was 3 A.M.

After breakfast Smith went to Chicago. The men he met there were given their orders with that terseness that is born of long command.

He minced no words. They were to get the tools and things to take a box at Brookfield. Soup would be needed to blast it open, if necessary. Discretion was their part to play in coming in to the town. The cranberry swamp back of the college campus was the safest hiding-place. They were to wait there till they got his signal.

"A polly is in Dutch," was all that the Mauve Mouse explained. The two yeggs nodded gravely. "Polly" was short for politician. "They're usually getting in bad, anyway," said Alias to Alibi, as the Mauve Mouse tossed over half the packet he had received from Cragan.

The Mouse left them to follow later. He had a half-hour for his train. A drug-store near the station supplied him with collodion for finger tips. He preferred it to gloves when on a job.

He also bought two bottles of the best French perfume. A thought had come to him that Helen would appreciate it. She was too poor to use the kind he liked. She was too sweet not to have any. He wondered if she would know that the six ounces he was bringing as a present had added a twenty-dollar bill to a cash-register without any change. He laughed at this. Easy come, easy go—it had always been that way with him.

The blush that mounted Helen's cheeks was perfect as he pressed the perfume into her hand. "Try it," he suggested, across the table. "It's just a little thought, you know. It's really all I dared get for you. I hope you'll take it."

Helen watched him from beneath her lashes as he went through the door. Her hand went over her heart as she stood perplexed and pleased. He had spoiled her for other men. There was that to him she had never known could exist.

He was bad. His eyes were a telltale. Yet with his hardness there was a grace of action—a sureness, that reminded her of a fencer or a dancer trained to the last ounce of his weight.

She glanced at her gingham dress. Her rolled-up sleeves revealed arms that were freckled and brown. Her hands were swollen from her work. She wanted them otherwise. She tried the perfume. Its aroma almost overcame her. Wealth and gold and rare things seemed to be imprisoned in its drops. He was spoiling her with the vague call of hidden things.

She decided to please him by wearing her best. He noted the change and frowned. He would have her other ways—unspoiled and unsophisticated.

Cole grew anxious. Two conferences were held in the seclusion of the cranberry-swamp. The woods were thick there. The night the Mauve Mouse had picked for the job was still days off. The mayor insisted it would be too late. The district attorney was too cock-sure to suit the politician. The matter of the indictments was the talk of the town. Men openly avoided him. The railroad had refused to call the county authorities off. Its attorney scoffed and said there was no proof.

Cole knew better. The bedplates were the nearest thing to a commitment to State prison that existed.

"Get done," snorted the mayor. "A week more and the papers will be shoutin' 'All about the great traction grab!' I know them—the stuff is already written. The whole pack is at my throat—it's flowers and stripes for your Uncle Dudley."

"Beat it, then," said the Mauve Mouse, glancing keenly into the deeper swamp. "Get into town. Start a poker-game, and don't leave it till daylight. That will cover you. Make it strong."

The Mouse whistled as the mayor climbed the fence and started down the road toward Brookfield. The whistle was repeated. Two men slouched out of the gloom.

"All right, boys," said the cracksman. "To-night's th' night. We start at twelve-thirty—no later. The polly's got a wire, it's now or never."

"We're ready," said one of the two. "We've been eatin' our mugs off, waitin'.

We dasn't show our noses, an' th' skeeters are fierce back there." The yegg jerked a stubby thumb over shoulder.

The Mauve Mouse turned. He stooped and lighted a cigarette. By the light of this he read his watch.

"Nine now," he said. "Be at the side door of the court-house at twelve-thirty. Rap twice and I'll let you in. Bring everything—the bag with the jimmies, and some chains. We may have to drop the cannon-ball out the window, and wheel it out here before we open it. It wouldn't do to wake the jail up, would it? Some of those prisoners might guess what was coming off."

"It 'll be a helova job," laughed Alias, as the Mauve Mouse climbed the fence toward the road. "Think of it—coppin' th' D. A.'s safe out of th' county jail! That's a rich deal, that is."

III.

THERE is an old saying in the underworld that: "Whatever can't be lifted can be dragged." The Mauve Mouse believed in this axiom thoroughly. One by one the doors of the district attorney's suite were sprung by master work from Alibi's jimmy.

The fireproof compartment, wherein was the cannon-ball, was protected by a network of wires that would wake the town if touched, severed or pressed together. A new, innocent-looking shutter stood before the door to this compartment.

The two yeggs grinned. They turned to their leader.

"At the side," he whispered. "Don't touch that shutter! The roof is protected. Rip out the false work. I'll stall at the window."

It was an hour later when they broke through. The noise they made would not have awakened a light sleeper. The Mauve Mouse peered through. He touched a fountain-pen flash-light, then backed. "Get this brick-work away from the floor," he ordered. "When that's done, slide the keister out—drag it out to the window. We'll never take it here. We might wake the watchman up."

The Mauve Mouse went to the lowered blind and peered through. It was after two o'clock. The town was dead. He examined the sash, then turned his attention to the sides of the window. It was not protected by a "bug." He pressed the catch over, listened, then lifted the window inch by inch.

A soft flower-bed was below. He marked the spot by dropping a coin. Then he turned toward the perspiring yeggs.

"Get some of those law-books out, and we'll roll it up on them," he suggested. "The law's a good thing, sometimes—it works both ways."

Alias grinned. The cannon-ball weighed all of four hundred pounds. The two grunted as they raised it inch by inch to the level of the window-sill. They waited. The Mauve Mouse peered out. The town-clock struck two. There followed a hollow boom from the clock in the tower at the college. "All right," he hissed, "get it on the sill, but don't let go till I give the office.

"Now!"

Alias and Alibi pressed it outward. The sill creaked and splintered. There was a moment of suspense — a leg caught. A ripping followed as the globe disappeared from their sight. A soft thud came up to them.

They waited with clenched fists—each breathing heavily. The Mauve Mouse thrust out his head, inch by inch. The safe lay deeply imbedded in the flower-patch. It loomed to him like a plum in a pudding. He lifted his eyes and searched the dark aisles of the tree-arched street. All was secure. His hand went back as he withdrew his head. He lowered the window and adjusted the blind to its former position.

The two yeggs waited as he crawled into the vault, and made a hasty search. The Mauve Mouse had known of cases where the treasure was not where it was supposed to be. It was an old trick to hide the funds of a bank in a hollow book, and lock up an empty safe. He was taking no chances.

Satisfied that whatever was worth taking was in the cannon-ball, he backed out through the brick-work and led the way down through the jimmied doors.

"We've got three hours till it cracks dawn—four till the town wakes," explained the Mauve Mouse. "Better roll the keister across the street to the stone sidewalk. Get it on that so we don't leave any trail. You, Alibi, dig round the corner and get that wheelbarrow back of the pig-iron dump—it's there. I saw it to-day." A "pig-iron dump" is a hardware-store.

Alibi slouched off, while the Mauve Mouse and Alias waited under the shelter of the jail. The barrow came through the gloom, its wheel squeaking. The Mauve Mouse fished an oil-can from a hip-pocket and oiled the axle. He always carried oil for tell-tale hinges, or other things that needed attention. These little details had won him the leadership.

He rose from his crouching position, listened, then motioned for the cannon-ball. A minute later, after a détour to throw off possible trailers, they started down the road that led to the cranberry swamp.

The night was like a vast tunnel. The stars were out, but a haze dimmed their luster. The town of Brookfield seemed wrapped in a shroud borrowed from Morpheus. The district attorney's bedplates made no protest as they were wheeled through the silent streets.

The two yeggs took turns at the handles till they reached a railroad track. Here the Mauve Mouse assisted them to roll the safe between the rails. He waited and listened. The wheelbarrow was dropped to the bottom of a ditch. It would be found there, after a search. The conclusion it pointed to was that the cannon-ball was loaded upon a hand-car or a train.

Rails, like water, leave no trail.

The outer circumference of the cannon-ball was a perfect sphere. The Mauve Mouse had figured on this. He drew a line with a piece of chalk. Along the rail they rolled the safe until they came abreast the woods that fringed the track. Back of this fringe was the underbrush that marked the edge of the swamp. Beyond rose the dark tower of the Library where the college was.

Mauve Mouse called a halt. Two tackles were rigged out of steel chain. One was passed over the double dial, the other about the base-plate. The two yeggs strained, grunted, and lifted the safe from the rail.

"Follow me," said the Mauve Mouse. "Step from rock to rock, if you can. Don't leave any tracks. Strike for the brush. We're almost at the camp."

The camp was a picked spot between two rocky outcroppings. Trees were over it, and brush closed it in. The Mauve Mouse flashed the way with his pocket-light. Alias dropped his end at a signal.

"Take a drink and a rest," laughed the Mauve Mouse. "You've earned it. I defy anybody to follow us from the court-house. They'd be dizzy before they started. If they don't hurry they'll have to come to Chi to get us—and we stand right, there."

Alibi passed the flask to Alias. The latter wiped his lips with his sleeve, then squared his jaw. He gazed down at the cannon-ball as if he would swallow it. He spat at it.

"What a hell of a grouch the fellow had who invented that," he husked, giving the safe a kick. "Keepin' hard-workin' gents like us from makin' an honest livin'."

The Mauve Mouse laughed. "Get the sledges," he ordered, "and see if you can get a wedge started. I want those bedplates within an hour."

"Goin' to hand them to th' polly?" asked Alibi, with a shrewd wink.

The Mauve Mouse passed over a leather case filled with a set of graduated slivers of steel. "I don't know," he answered. "They'd be mighty fine things to hold for the highest bidder. We'd never do time if we had them intact."

"Intact is good," agreed Alibi, swinging a short sledge to test its weight. "I mind th' time—"

"Go on!" snapped the Mauve Mouse.

The yegg swung the sledge. The wedge entered, then broke off flush with the rim of the door. Another was started with a low curse. It was like getting an opening in the breech of a twelve-inch gun. There was no give to the stubborn metal.

Other wedges were tried. They broke as the first. Knife-points were inserted. They slivered against the hardened steel.

Alibi rose to his full height. He swung the heavy weight over his shoulder. His jaw clamped as he brought the sledge down upon the knob of the dial. Other blows followed. Alias relieved him. They pounded at every projection that offered a mark. They battered the face, then turned the safe over and sheared it from its soft-metal base.

A berserk rage seized the two cracksmen. They were beyond all control. The Mauve Mouse backed as they went at the stubborn metal with a clank of blows like a steam-riveter on a rampage.

The Mauve Mouse glanced at the sky to the eastward. He turned his watch-face to the half-light of the glade. It was four o'clock. He frowned. Dawn was almost due. They had made no progress, save to batter the cannon-ball to a shapeless mass.

"Try a shot of soup," he ordered, as a last resort.

Alibi dropped back in the brush. He appeared almost instantly with a small rubber bag. Alias rolled the cannon-ball till its battered face was upward. A thin crack showed there.

Alibi deftly formed a cup out of yellow soap. The bottom of this cup was over the suture. The bag was tipped slightly. A drop of oily nitroglycerin fell. Others followed. The cup filled. Alibi set the bag at the side of the safe, whipped out a double-X detonator, laid it across the cup, and lit the fuse.

"Back!" shouted the Mauve Mouse, seizing Alias by the arm. They ran. Alibi followed through the underbrush. They stood in a group and waited. The Mauve Mouse glanced down at Alibi's hand. He wheeled him by the shoulder.

"Where's the dinny?" he shouted hoarsely. "What did you do with the bag of soup?"

Alibi's hand went up to his brow. "Hell!" he blurted. "I left it by th' keister!"

The Mauve Mouse threw himself at the yegg with tigerish savagery. The two went down. Alias dropped to the ground and waited with bated breath. A fuse sputtered through the gloom. A flash and a roar followed. A pillar of dazzling yellow-fire shot up to the zenith. The earth rocked.

Then, amid the cloud of flying fragments overhead, there flashed a wild star that burned the night and was gone.

IV.

THE Mauve Mouse reached the professor's house at sunup. He had been through a hard night. His clothes were slightly torn. There was a cup upon his chin. He had succeeded in hiding this with the same collodion he had used on his finger-tips.

The search he had made for the cannon-ball safe had proved a vain one. It had been lifted in the air by a full quart of powerful nitroglycerin. Where it had landed was a mystery to him. The most likely place for it to come down was the cranberry swamp. They had agreed upon this as he dismissed the two yeggs, who were to hurry back to Chicago by the first freight and await his coming at a later date.

Helen greeted him at the breakfast table. No one in the boarding-house knew that he had been out all night. There was that to Helen's manner as he took his seat which attracted his attention. She seemed preoccupied. Once she dropped a dish. He stooped with her in order to recover it. Their heads came close together. They rose hesitatingly and stood side by side. The Mauve Mouse reached back then and grasped his chair.

"What is it?" he asked, feeling the flame that blazed from her eyes.

Helen's finger crept to her lip. She turned and glanced toward the kitchen door. "It's a secret," she stammered. "Promise me that you won't tell."

The Mauve Mouse nodded. "I've kept many secrets," he said truthfully. "I'll promise on my honor, Helen."

The girl hesitated. She searched his face intently. "Father," she whispered, "has finally found it! He has been searching the garden for a long time."

"What for, Helen?" he asked as she paused.

"For a meteorite that fell."

"A meteorite?"

"Yes, Mr. Smith. It is a big one, he says. He's gone to town to get help to dig it up. It's way down deep. He's been searching and searching for it. Then he found it this morning—isn't that grand? Poor papa!"

The note of love in the girl's voice struck the Mauve Mouse as a thing to remember and cherish.

"This meteorite," he asked, struck by a sudden thought—"this thing your father found—how big is it?"

"Father says it must be as big around as a beer-keg—that's just what he said."

A thought struck the Mauve Mouse as if a pistol-shot had been fired within the room. He had been trained in a hard school; but despite this, his hand gripped the top of the chair and drew it toward him with the knotting of his muscles. Suppose, he thought, almost aloud—suppose the professor's find was the safe that had been projected into the air by the explosion of Alibi's quart of nitro? Suppose it was the cannon-ball? He forced a smile as he turned toward the girl.

"May I see it? Can you show me where you father found it?"

The girl's answer was to nod toward the kitchen. The Mauve Mouse tossed his napkin upon the table and followed her as she passed through the doorway. The grace of her motion held him, despite the danger of the situation, should the meteorite prove to be the missing safe.

The professor, with two workmen, came through the back fence as Helen pointed out the spot where the meteorite had been discovered. The Mauve Mouse leaned and examined the depression where the professor had been exploring. He was pushed aside by the excited scientist, who was all-eager to see the discovery.

The two workmen struck a metallic substance after they had gone down two feet. This was uncovered, then lifted to the surface with difficulty. The Mauve Mouse stooped and examined it long and critically. It looked badly battered, and was coated with dirt and rust. It was the same size as the cannon-ball safe he had stolen from the district attorney's office.

There was a light of understanding in his eyes as he turned toward the girl.

"What time," he asked, "does the county clerk or this district attorney come down to work?"

"About ten," said Helen. "I think it's about ten. Why do you ask, Mr. Smith?"

"It's eight now," he said, consulting his watch. "It's eight, Miss Helen. The reason I asked is that you had better have your father record this find. Have him make an affidavit. It may be necessary to prove ownership. This is a very rare and valuable specimen. It is his, by right of finding. It should make him rich. People will want to buy it. I know one man who will."

The girl's eyes brightened. "And father—poor father is so deserving," she said with deep feeling.

It was the light in her eyes and the depth of her pity for the old scientist that showed the Mauve Mouse a game that would right many wrongs and bring justice where justice was due.

The district attorney would discover the loss of the safe by ten o'clock, the cracksman figured. Calvin Cole, fortified with a poker alibi, might be suspected, but never connected with the job. The two yeggs were bound to leave some trace that investigation would show led to Chicago.

There, however, the trail would end. No man would suspect him, the Mauve Mouse concluded. He did not look like a peterman capable of lifting a four-hundred-pound cannon-ball out of a county jail. He could stay in town with entire safety. In fact, he knew it would be far safer for him to stay than to leave.

He turned toward the waiting girl. The hard glitter to his eyes was gone. "Helen," he said softly, "I think that you should tell your father to place the meteorite in the college museum. I know a scientist in Chicago—he's keen for meteorites. He'll pay any price. This one weighs over four hundred pounds. It's a big find—it may make your father rich. Think—what that means to you! I'll telegraph for this man to come."

Helen's brows lifted. It meant everything to her. It meant fine clothes, hats,

peace, instead of eternal drudgery. It would leave her father free to experiment with his theories.

One doubt only filled her mind—the meteorite might not be worth what the Mauve Mouse thought it was. She smiled at his enthusiasm. Her hand went out to him. "I'll tell him," she said, "just what you suggest. I'll—"

The girl turned and inclined her head. The raucous clanging of bells sounded from the town. A boy came running up, shouting:

"Somebody's robbed the jail! The safe is stolen out of the county court-house! Somebody pinched the district attorney's papers! Hully gee! Ain't dat de limit?"

The Mauve Mouse turned slowly. His eyes swept from the girl to the professor. That individual was examining the fallen star with the air of his powerful spectacles.

"Well?" asked the cracksman, stepping over.

"Most extraordinary," mumbled the scientist. "A true specimen from sidereal space—a remarkable specimen, young man!"

"It is," declared the Mauve Mouse with conviction.

V.

It was late in the afternoon when Cragan, of the Shower of Gold saloon, reached Brookfield. Calvin Cole had wired for him to come down. The mayor had acted from a suggestion dropped by Eddie Smith, the Mauve Mouse. The town was in arms. Search was being made everywhere for the stolen strong-box. The wheelbarrow had been found by the side of the tracks as Cragan alighted from the passenger-train.

A detective was on the platform. He eyed the saloon-keeper, then passed a suspicious eye over his ample form and heavy, hamlike hands. He turned and followed.

"There's hell poppin'," blurted the mayor as he drew Cragan into an automobile. "Some awful thieves have stolen the district attorney's safe. Now isn't that *terrible?*"

Cragan fished out a cigar. "It sure is," he chuckled. "Any clue?"

The mayor's outburst had been for the benefit of the chauffeur. "I ain't out of the woods yet," he whispered. "Keep mum—you're a scientist from Chicago University. Here's some kale to buy me out. Remember you've heard all about the great meteorite that's been discovered in Professor Marr's garden. The Mauve Mouse says it's the safe."

Cragan moved to the end of the seat. He glared at the mayor, then at the rapidly unrolling countryside. He half lifted himself, as if to jump out. The mayor was mad as a hatter, he concluded.

"Stand pat—here we are," said the mayor, pointing toward an old stone building. "This is the college museum. Professor Marr will be waiting. He's got an idea his damn' shootin' star is worth a million. Chicago ought to have it. It should go to your university to-day. It's a wonderful specimen of—yegg work." This last had been dropped into Cragan's ear as an enlighter.

The saloon-keeper whistled. He was beginning to see a light.

The two descended from the auto as it drew up under an ivy arch.

"This way," said the mayor, taking Cragan by the arm. "This way, Professor Cragan. Up these steps, like this. Now along the hall. Right in here, now. Here we are. There is the professor who owns the meteorite. The girl is his daughter. The young man is Mr. Smith—a student."

"Umph!" throated Cragan, thrusting his hand out to the aged professor. "Glad to meet a fellow scientist," he said blandly.

"Pleased," cackled Professor Marr, wincing in the saloon-keeper's strong grip.

"Where's this—this wonderful discovery—this meteor-star?" asked Cragan, glancing about the fossils.

Cole nudged the saloon-keeper in the back. He turned. "Ah," he exclaimed, "there it is! What a remarkable specimen, professor!"

"Not that!" Cole hissed in Cragan's ear. "That's a paleolithic brick. The one on the pedestal!"

Cragan went over and tapped the professor's find. It was round and hard and metallic. It had been pitted and scorched

by a tremendous fire. It was flat in one place, "where it had struck the earth"—the professor explained.

"How much do you want for—this?" asked Cragan, throwing out his chest.

The Mauve Mouse glanced at Helen Marr. He formed the word "twenty" behind Cragan's back. His lips repeated the signal. The girl turned as the scientist was about to speak. "Father!" she exclaimed. "Father will not take a cent less than twenty thousand dollars for this meteor. It is worth it—every penny of it!"

She glanced at the Mauve Mouse to confirm her statement. Her eyes twinkled. He nodded his head toward Cragan. He edged alongside the scientist and pressed his toe. Then, as an afterthought, he got Cole's attention.

"Buy it at any price," he whispered. "Don't waste any time—the D. A. is liable to get hep any minute. Get the bed-plates out of town."

The mayor of Brookfield was in a quandary. He did not believe in endowing college professors with a life annuity. As far as he could see, the mass of metal before him was not worth its weight in junk.

The bed-plates were inside, however. It was up to him to destroy them, or somebody might call the district attorney's attention to the similarity between the lost safe and the meteorite. The Mauve Mouse had explained that it was the only thing to do. He had refused to steal it again for any consideration.

Cole nodded as Cragan turned. "All right," snapped the pseudo-scientist, "I'll take it for twenty thousand dollars. The university will have to foot the bill. I've got the cash here. Make out a receipt."

Helen turned a strained face toward the Mauve Mouse. Her eyes shone bright with gratitude. She smiled as he quickly witnessed the professor's signature to the bill of sale. Cragan flourished the paper, pocketed it, and drew forth a roll of bills.

"We'll be back in thirty minutes," he said as he turned toward the door. "I'll send a truck for the sa—for the meteorite. My college chums will be—will be—For th' love of Mike!"

The Mauve Mouse wheeled as Helen grasped his arm. Three men stood in the gloom of the hallway. Two of them looked like detectives—the other came forward.

"I'm the district attorney of this county," he explained dramatically. "You know me, Cole—damn well! You're under arrest, Cole."

"For what?" blurted the mayor.

"For a lot of things—for every crime on the calendar—including safe-breaking."

"You're full of hop!" shouted the mayor.

The district attorney turned toward the meteorite. "That!" he exclaimed, pointing. "That is my safe! There are affidavits enough in it to send you away for your natural life. I've got you right, Cole, dead bang to rights. Come in, boys. Arrest the mayor!"

"That sa—meteor is mine!" shouted Cragan. "I bought it—here's th' receipt. I'm a professor from the University of Chicago, I am!"

"You look like a yegg," laughed the district attorney. "Do you mean to tell me *that* is a meteorite?"

Cragan was silent. His face grew red. The Mauve Mouse pressed Helen's hand, then led her to the professor. He turned.

"Gentlemen," he said, with an edge to his voice that held the group—"gentlemen, there has been some error here. I'm a stranger—a student in the college. I don't know you people—except Miss Marr and her father. I'm boarding with them. A meteor—a falling star was discovered by the professor this morning. I helped dig it up and bring it here. The professor has just sold it to this gentleman from the University of Chicago. He paid a rather high price for it, but it is sold. The transaction is closed—completely."

"He has sold stolen property!" exclaimed the district attorney.

"This—meteor," suggested the cracksman, "came from heaven. It fell out of the sky into the professor's celery-bed—therefore it is his own."

"That ain't a meteor—that's a stolen safe!"

The Mauve Mouse turned and tapped the meteorite with his finger-nail. "What leads you to this impression?" he asked.

"Two things," sneered the district attorney. "Cragan was followed from the station and seen to get in Cole's automobile. The papers in Cole's case were in my safe—this strong-box. It was to the mayor's interest to destroy the papers—or the safe. His hired thugs blew it into the professor's yard—carelessly—when they tried to open it. When I heard about the find, and where Cragan was bound, I saw a light—a clear light, my friend."

"But, father," said Helen sweetly, "it *is* a meteorite—surely you know?"

The aged professor removed his glasses, polished them with the corner of a handkerchief, then replaced them upon his nose. From a vest-pocket he fished a small penknife. All eyes followed his actions as he drew the point of the blade across the pitted surface of the sphere.

It was soft. It was iron. It was easily scratched!

"Are you convinced, gentlemen?" asked Professor Marr. "A safe or a strong-box of this shape would be made of the hardest kind of steel—case-hardened, I think they call it. Besides this test, what was the weight of your safe, Mr. District Attorney?"

"About four hundred and fifty pounds —or close to that."

"This meteor weighs over five hundred pounds," added the professor severely. "I give you my word as a scientist that it is a true visitor from space."

It was the Mauve Mouse's turn to feel surprise. He glanced from the positive face of the aged scientist to the puzzled one of the district attorney. The mystery was far from being cleared. He had believed the professor's find to be the missing cannon-ball safe. The district attorney believed likewise. The professor, however, had proved his discovery.

The Mauve Mouse had an inspiration.

"When did this—this meteor fall into your garden, professor?" he asked with gaining hope.

"Years and years ago," said the professor. "I looked for it at the time. Its light woke me up. I never thought it had struck so close to the house. But I searched. It got covered over when we plowed. Then this morning I was weeding, and saw traces of burned earth. The rest you know."

"I'll trouble you to take the bracelets off my friend the mayor, then!" shouted Cragan in a bull-like voice. "If this bunch of junk fell years and years ago, it ain't no safe, Mr. District Attorney. It ain't th' safe you're lookin' for. You lost yours last night."

The district attorney turned toward the professor. "Are you certain?" he asked.

"It's a true meteorite. It was cold when I found it."

"Take off the handcuffs then," blurted the district attorney. "I'll get you later, Cole," he added bitterly.

The mayor rubbed his wrists in relieved satisfaction. He shot a shrewd, underbrowed glance at the Mauve Mouse as the detectives, followed by the fuming district attorney, passed out through the doorway.

"Come on!" said Cole. "Come on, Cragan! We'll donate this beautiful piece of junk to Brookfield College. It ain't no good to us, save as a door-weight or somethin' like that. We forgot to give it to that fresh district attorney."

"But them bedplates?" exclaimed the saloon-keeper. "Where's th' safe they were in?"

"I ain't no detective," snapped the disgusted Cole. "How should *I* know? I've endowed th' professor for life—that's all I know. I guess I'm stung by this mix-up. I thought I was buyin' somethin' worth while." The mayor shot a keen glance toward the Mauve Mouse.

"Good-by, boys!" said Eddie Smith sweetly. "Good-by and good luck! I don't imagine that you will hear anything more from your friend the district attorney. The bedplates are probably in the swamp —yards under. I was wrong—that's all."

"What are you going to do, Eddie?" asked the mayor curiously.

Eddie Smith, *alias* the Mauve Mouse, turned toward Helen Marr.

Her eyes shone with a glad light.

"Me? I?" he said. "Why, I'm going to stay right here in Brookfield, and complete a course in domestic science. Look for the announcement later."

Hero by Inheritance

by J. L. Schoolcraft

Author of "Death's Secret," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN WHO WOULD NOT.

"SLACKER!" said the man who took it upon himself to make Jean Chabot register.

"Faker!" said the exemption board.

"No pride of race!" said the surgeon.

"Yellow," said I.

I am not sure that these other remarks were made about Jean Chabot, but I know that he tried to evade registration. I know also that he presented a claim for exemption. I also know that he tried to play deaf, dumb, and blind in the physical examination, but a man has about as much chance of fooling an army surgeon as a German peace move has with Lloyd George.

As for my connection with him, for many months of my life I was known as Chabot's sergeant. It got to me at first, but now I am proud of it, and I am not sure but what our constant association was not productive of mutual benefit.

He came into the National Guard with the New York draft. We had a good company of boys, all from one locality, but we were about a dozen men short. At the first draft they sent us this Chabot and eleven others. They came trailing in behind a mounted sergeant, carrying newspapered bundles of their worldly possessions. They looked hot and uncomfortable and unprepossessing in their civilian clothes.

We started in, of course, to make life pleasant for them. Men in the mass are just like boys; so we accorded them the same welcome that strange boys would get in a new school.

As they passed down the company street to report at headquarters we would remark: "I like the dark one," or "How did he ever get by?" Meaning absolutely nothing by it of course, and they knew it.

Except this Chabot. He looked and acted like an ox. He was short and rather stocky, with a wide, low forehead, dark eyes set wide apart, knobby cheek-bones, and a wiry mustache that served as *camouflage* for the lower part of his face.

When he came out of headquarters and had been shown the tent in which he was to hive with seven other worthies, he went in and sat on the edge of his cot, saying nothing, and looking about as intelligent as a cigar-store Indian. Filled with a desire to bring a little color into his life, somebody yelled: "Come on out here!" He just sat. So somebody reached under the tent and tipped up the cot on which he was sitting. Then he sat on the floor, looking twice as stupid as he did before. With that the boys formed a ring and started shoving him around. That was a little game they played with one another all the time and, of course, the trick was to try to start somebody else around the circle. Well, this Chabot just went round and round until he was so dizzy he could not stand up and he said not a word nor looked a thought. By and by the boys tired of it and left him sitting on the tent floor, like a man in a trance.

I howled when I found from the orderly-

room slips what had been his previous occupation. He worked for one of the news services in New York, riding in the subway all day, filling slot-machines. I remember having seen others of the same occupation, with a leather wallet in which to put the pennies and a drumlike case full of gum nuggets and chocolate slabs and other delicacies which snare the coppers of the man who waits for the local.

And he had the nerve to present a claim for exemption on the basis that his work was necessary! However, no exemption board in the world would consider him one of the keystones of the commonwealth in the great fight for freedom.

Have you ever seen the type of man who has never taken an hour's exercise and who is so out of tune that he cannot keep in step? Chabot was such, and after about a day's drill the captain put me in charge of him.

By which I came to be known as Chabot's sergeant. "The hours I have spent with thee," Chabot, marching with my arm twined in yours, trying to make you keep step, would make a clock sick. After that we had "change step" together, which is nothing more nor less than a little skip such as one executed in the days of two-stepping, but that Chabot almost put me in my grave before he learned to skip.

It was not only that he *could* not; he *would* not, and there was absolutely no way of appealing to him whatever. He would stand looking so plumb all gone above that I wanted to march him out at sunrise and do the usual.

At the end of a month we were to have our first regimental parade and inspection. Some big men from Washington were coming down, and some enthusiastic plutocrat who had a son in the regiment had put up a silver cup and a big cash prize for the company winning the competitive drill. The boys were on their toes to win it, for that money would look well in the mess fund.

We had a good chance, too, for there was a lot of pride in the company, and the men had eaten up the drill so that we were just about as good as anybody in the division.

Well, I worked hard with Chabot for days before that drill. He was strictly neutral in regard to which was his right and which was his left, and I could not get him to make a clean-cut decision for either side. I tried tying things on him, but that made no difference. Finally I got the habit of walking in the line of file closers, which brought me by his side, so that I could guide a bit with the butt of my gun. I am afraid I gave his ribs a bad time more than once, but he never seemed to get sore.

About five minutes before assembly on parade day I went over him with the same loving care which a mother might lavish on her daughter who is about to be a bride.

"Now, let's see," I said, "your hat is on, and your hat-cord is present and accounted for, with the knot in front, and your coat is on, and your breeches, and your leggings are laced, and you have your shoes on and they are shined. And all the flaps are buttoned. Now let's go through the manual of arms a bit to see how you are to-day. All right, inspection! Arms!"

At this command the recruit is supposed to bring his gun up across his body, pull back the bolt, and at the next command, shove back the bolt, and pull the trigger, for pulling out the bolt cocks the gun. Well, we had been firing blanks the day before, and somehow or other, this bird had left a clip in his gun. So when I yelled, "Order!" he pushed back the bolt and pulled the trigger. The result was a loud explosion, and the gun kicked out of his hands and lay on the floor.

Nobody was hurt; instead a big roar went up at the surprised look on his face. But here were the bugles blowing assembly and his gun full of powder fouling. I had just spent about an hour standing over him while he cleaned it. And a dirty gun at inspection means a lot of demerits. I could see that cup departing on the wings of the morn.

A good parade makes up for all the hardships of camp life. Our drill-ground was a beauty—a flat ground, smooth as a turf court lying between hills that reached up about a thousand feet. The news had got out, of course, that there was to be a parade and all around the field was an edging of vari-colored parasols, close up to the little

flags that marked the edges of the parade-ground.

The colonel and the visitors made a fine sight as they came cantering up with all their aids and orderlies. We formed and opened ranks for inspection.

The adjutant raved for a while getting us on the line, and then he marched out and the colonel got off his horse to answer his salute. There was a lot of sword flashing, and they came across the green to inspect the gallant crew enrolled in A company, first battalion, which was no other than us. We all had our bayonets on, and were up on our toes, because we thought we would get a little more than the others because of being the first company.

Up the line the first gun went up. The inspecting-officer grabbed it as though he meant to run with it, which is the military way of doing it. Then he passed on without looking at it at all; just handed it back as though he intended to hand it right through its owner to the man in back of him. Well, the boys were a little anxious and threw their guns up long before the officer came to them. I could see their polished puttees and boots of the reviewing party and the tips of their caps moving along the line pretty swiftly. I was praying that they would not look at Chabot's gun.

That bonehead would not bring his gun up.

I whispered to him: "Bring your gun up! Bring your gun up!" But he waited until they were in front of him and were looking right at him before he jerked the rifle up.

And then he dropped it!

It fell and took a big gouge out of the inspector's boot with the bayonet. The latter did not turn a hair; just stood and waited for Chabot to pick it up. And Chabot stood there like an ox waiting for the inspecting-officer to pick it up.

"Pick it up," growled the colonel, and he did. Of course then the inspecting-officer looked up at the sun through the barrel and saw enough powder fouling in it to disqualify the whole company.

"The gun is dirty," he remarked to an aid, and the aid put it down on the little pad where he was keeping score.

The company did not stir, but you could almost hear what the boys were thinking.

CHAPTER II.

CHABOT'S WAR.

AFTER the rounds had been made we closed ranks and prepared to pass in review. Since we were the first company, we had the first move to make, and were to march right behind the band. The colonel's party marched back across the green and mounted. The band moved out and the drum-major stood with his baton raised, waiting for the command to march.

"Pass in review—first company—first battalion—squads right!" sang out the colonel like a monk chanting the gospel.

"Squads right!" echoed our captain.

"*March!*" bawled the colonel. The band moved off with the drum-major dancing in front and struck up "Stars and Stripes Forever."

"*March!*" echoed our captain and we executed squads right.

That is all except Chabot. He turned to the left.

The consequence was that in swinging around his gun clipped the head of a little private who was marching behind him. The latter looked glassy for a moment and then fell over, cold. The squad behind came swinging around to music that would make a dead man march.

They fell, that is most of them did, over the boy lying on the ground. There was considerable milling around for a minute and then the rear of the company stood still, while the front of the company marched, thinking what a fine appearance they presented.

We had a second lieutenant who had all the wisdom of three years in college and three months in training-camp.

"Company right—company left, oh, dear! I mean *column* left," he yelled in a high voice. In the mean time the colonel had cantered over and was sitting there watching the whole mess.

The second lieutenant finally got us untangled and marched the rear end of the

company around the obstruction and they went stringing across the green in pursuit of the others. It was a wonderful looking maneuver all right. Chabot just stood there, looking like a cement block. At my command he took hold of the legs of the still unconscious victim and we bore him off through the hedges of parasols. There was considerable fluttering and some of them followed us to the hospital tent, saying what a poor boy and how noble he looked, so pale and heroic.

Well, even so, we got second place in the competition. If it had not been for one J. Chabot, we would have had first.

It is funny how seriously you can take these things. When you get a lot of men together they are just like kids. Besides, have you ever seen a soldier whose one interest in life was not food? We had been figuring on how that cash prize would relieve the tedium of slum and beans, and along comes this Chabot and spoils the whole thing.

The men were just like kids, too, in the way they took it out on Chabot. They swiped his gun oil, his clothes, parts of his kit just before inspection. The consequences was that he was doing kitchen police most of the time, which means that he had to carry refuse and peel potatoes. As far as I can see he felt just as happy doing that as anything else.

The cook was pretty sore at him for getting the culinary department in wrong by peeling potatoes thick, and even throwing some good ones away.

He was a shirker all right. If we went on a hike, he would go with an empty canteen to lighten his load and then come around and beg a drink from some worthy boy who had been toting several fluid ounces of nectar for fifteen miles.

After his famous play he could not have got a drink had he been dying. Furthermore the boys took care that he did not get any from other companies. One of them would follow him around at every halt and make sure that his dark past was known.

How we tried to get rid of him! Whenever a new company hove in sight, our top sergeant would spend a lot of money buying pop and cigars for the new top sergeant, and well along in the evening he would say, very casually of course: "We have an extra man. If you are short, I think I can arrange a transfer."

And the new top sergeant would peel down his eyelid and say:

"Do you see anything green there?"

Finally the captain took it up with the colonel. He asked that Chabot be dismissed as a congenial bonehead or something as bad. The colonel sent for us all—the captain, Chabot and me—and we marched up to the colonel's tent. Chabot guessed what was in the wind, for he looked really animated.

"Want to get back to your slot-machines," I said with sarcasm, "think the public misses you?"

He never troubled himself to answer any remark unless he felt like it. This time he said "Yeah," and almost grinned. His face creaked doing it, for as far as I know, this was the first time he had smiled in his life.

We marched into the tent and the captain saluted and I stood at attention as best I knew, which is pretty fair. The colonel had a desk made out of two cracker-boxes with a board laid across the top and a canvas camp-stool, on which he perched. Honest, I do not see how he ever got into the army. He came about up to my pocket-flaps and he was so thin that in riding-trousers and boots he looked like a military mosquito.

All the same he was a fine looking old boy, with blue eyes set in a tanned face, and long white mustache. If he had never been an Indian fighter, he should have, for he certainly looked the part.

"Well, Chabot," said the colonel, mild as Mary's lamb. "What's the matter? Don't you like the military life?"

"No," grunted Chabot.

"What is the matter? Aren't you getting fair treatment?"

"I suppose so," he said. Then he began to get sore.

"What did I ever do that I should be dragged out here? I ain't got any quarrel with the Kaiser or the Crown Prince or Hindenburg, or any of those guys that they are always saying must be crushed."

"I know," said the colonel, "but your government has voted for war. You are represented and it is your will as much as any one's. I have studied military history in a small way and I can assure you that a nation never had a worthier or more unselfish ideal."

That gave me a thrill. He said it as quietly as a minister announcing the hymn, but it is those quiet boys who get the effect. A man might tear his lungs out, saying the same thing on a Fourth of July, and half the crowd would wander off to the soda-fountain and not even know that he was talking.

"Government, hell!" said Chabot, "I never voted. They are all the same to me. What's the government ever done for me except to make me go to war!"

"I ought to warn you," said the colonel, still as mild as milk, "that treasonable statements are liable to punishment."

You could have knocked me over with a feather to hear the colonel debating with this slacker. I knew he had the fire. Many a time he has come down the company street and not liked the way in which some sergeant was loafing around the orderly-room, and said: "What grade are you!" "Sergeant, sir," would be the answer. "Indeed," would say the colonel, "you are wrong. You are a private!" That has happened lots of times, and odd as it may seem, it made him popular. Which is only more proof that men in the mass are like boys and want to be bullied.

"Treason be damned!" was Chabot's answer to his remark. "This ain't my war!"

With that the colonel turned to steel. Chabot had been standing sloppily, with his belt-line out, his feet apart, and his chest in.

The colonel just looked at him.

"Attention!" he snapped.

In spite of himself, Chabot's feet came together, his belt-line came in, and his chest went out.

"You say this is not your war," he said. "*It is going to be!*"

With that the interview ended and we all marched out. The captain just looked at Chabot. "Oh, my hat!" he groaned, "Oh, my hat!" and added a lot of things not fit to print. They were uttered not so much in the tone of a man who curses as in the tone of a man who prays for strength. When he got through he said: "Take him away! Take him away!"

If that bird Chabot did not lie in wait for me that night behind the cook tent! He was sore clean through at not getting out of the army, and as I was going by the cook tent, where he had been peeling potatoes, he reached out and gave me a good one over the shoulder and on the jaw.

There was no one in sight and we mixed it pretty generously all over the lot. He was smaller than I and knew absolutely nothing about boxing. Even so, it was a pretty good fight, and I carried away a large red nose.

But I knew a little about the manly art of self-defense and made him dizzy in a minute. He fouled in all sorts of ways, fighting like a rat. When he was down and sitting against the wood-pile, trying to readjust the solar system, I was actually fond of him.

I had thought that hitherto he had absolutely no spirit, but here he was showing enough enterprise, misdirected it is true, to wallop me in the back.

Have you ever noticed that two kids will have a long standing grouch against each other and then fight it off? After that we were as clubby as it was possible to be with a man made out of indifference, reenforced by distaste. But I had begun to have a sort of proprietary interest in him, just like a teacher in a reform-school or a prison guard.

We had a sort of slogan around camp that ran like this: "Fourth of July in camp, Thanksgiving in the trenches; and Christmas in Paradise." Chabot used to turn green when he heard it, which was just what the boys wanted. They used to pull it around him all the time.

And when the papers announced that the Germans were making up corpses into lubricating oil, family soap, and such toilet articles, I would go up to Chabot and say: "Never mind, old top, I will manage to get into the same cake of soap with you." That used to irritate him some, although his irritation was visible only to the trained

eye, as were the expressions of any intelligence or emotion on his part.

One of the boys made up a little wooden cross, a miniature of those which mark the resting-places of those fallen in battle. He came in with it one day and walked up to Chabot, who was sitting on the edge of his cot, looking intellectually feeble. "By the special order of the Kaiser," he said, "I confer on you, Jean Chabot, the order of the wooden cross."

With that he hung it around his neck. I thought he would be too stupid to get it, but he did, and pulled the thing off and threw it away. He was afraid all right.

The first thing that struck me when we got to France was the fact that there were about a million men there who looked a lot like Chabot. When we piled off the transport and marched up a street about as wide as a Boston alley and as smooth underfoot, there were about a dozen of them lined up on the sidewalk, with their arms in slings, heads wrapped up, and so forth.

I suppose America is such a composite country that we have no type, whereas in an old country like France the men run truer to type. At any rate, I have seen dozens of them that you could not tell apart—short men, with broad, low foreheads, eyes set wide apart, black hair, knobby cheek-bones, and a thick black mustache that covered the lower part of the face. They looked like Jean Chabot with the exception that they were lively and intelligent.

And in that same village there was a shop with the sign reading, "Jean Chabot." I did not know enough French to make out the rest of it.

"Look, Jean," I said, "here is your ancestral mansion." He turned and gazed at the sign and showed some faint signs of life. But just then a buxom Frenchwoman ran out into the road with a twin on each arm and held them up for the colonel to kiss. Which he did like a gallant soldier, and turned scarlet, and hustled us out of the town.

It was a bit spooky to run across that sign, but I have since learned that there are about as many Jean Chabots in France as there are John Smiths in America.

We got into camp all right and started in on months of bombing, bayoneting, trench work, marching, stringing wire, "up-and-over" practise. All this took place far back of the lines where we could not hear the sound of a gun or see actual fighting.

Men in blue worked alongside men in brown, showing us how. "Up-and-over" practise was great sport. We had to scramble out of a trench, race across a hundred yards or more of broken ground, bayonet a few dummies painted to look like Wilhelm, Von Hindenburg, and a few other notables we were anxious to meet, and then down into another trench, which we immediately started to reverse; that is, make the parapet the back and *vice versa*.

Those were great months: playing around, feeling fit. But how we hated the man that invented paved roads! They were great for the transport and it was a fine sight to see the *camions* rolling by with five tons of munitions piled up, but they were not good for him who rides on the good mare, Shanks. They were long and white, with some cruel, hard stuff underfoot that just about jarred the life out of you every time a foot came down.

By and by our helmets were served out and we were scarcely distinguishable from the British and French, except that the latter wore the horizon blue. Chabot became a regular Frenchman, in looks if not in spirit.

He and I were coming out of a village one night when a Frenchwoman rushed out, called him Pierre and began talking French to him at express train speed. He stood there looking as blank as usual. It was several minutes before she realized that he was in khaki and not in blue. Then she squawked out "*Pardon!*" and laughed like a good one.

"Know anything about your family?" I asked him.

"Never had any that I know of," he said.

"Where were you born?"

"I don't know," he said, unusually talkative for him; "the first thing I remember is an alley in New York full of clothes poles. I remember a fire-escape that got

so hot in the summer that it burned my hands."

That is all he knew about himself and I figured right there that that was what was wrong with him. Patriotism, like charity, starts at home, and we get the habit of loving our country by loving our families. That is why married men are quick to enlist. He had absolutely no ties and no schooling to open anything up to him. I resolved right then and there to be as decent to him as anybody could be. It was a pretty hard sight to see him hanging around when the mail with letters and packages came in. As far as I know he never got anything except those packages that were made up by the dozen by some patriotic women.

CHAPTER III.

CHABOT'S GRAVE.

THE time came when we had bombed and bayoneted ourselves into perfect condition and were to go up to the front. We were all fit as a football team and as anxious to be up and at them. This camp life is one way of making a fighter and about the best; they put you in camp and keep you there until you become so bored that you would walk down the throat of a sixteen-inch gun for a little excitement.

We set off without music. We were a good three days' march behind the front and could have gone up in trucks or on the railroad train, but there was no hurry and so we swung off. We did our regulation fifteen miles the first day and fifteen more the second. On the third we could hear the mutter of guns up ahead, and the division began to split and branch off to various places behind the first trenches.

We left the main road and struck out on one that wound along the side of a hill. It was dirt, unpaved, and believe me, it was like rubber heels to the feet. We marched and got into camp that afternoon. We had quarters in an old, fortified farm with a white wall about ten feet thick running around a group of white buildings. We dribbled off to the barns and raked some straw together for beds, and put up a wire to battalion headquarters and made the place generally shipshape.

The next afternoon we started off to the trenches. The road was so pitted with shell holes that the wheel tracks wound like a corkscrew all the way. There had been bitter fighting here in the early days of the war, and the fields were dotted with clumps of black crosses. On some of them hung the cloth *képis*, for in those days the "French derby," as our boys called the steel helmets, had not been invented. There were the usual rows of poplars along the road, and out of one of them dangled a frayed rope ladder from what had once been an artillery observation post.

The sun went down while we were marching, and the moon came sailing over the hills. It was so bright that when we came to a cross roads and halted, our captain read his map without flashing his torch. We marched along in and out of cavernous shadows, and the singing and joking stopped, for many of the boys' thoughts flew back home at the sight of that glorious moonlight lying so soft on the land.

All of a sudden there was a tremendous spurt of orange flame at our left and a noise like a collision. We all jumped some and laughed a bit nervously, for we had not been thinking of war at all. A French battery was dug in at our left. We could see nothing of the guns, but in a few seconds there came another spurt of flame, out of the ground it seemed, and the long, withdrawing roar of a departing shell. They went down the battery, firing at about five second intervals and then everything was as quiet and as sleepy as before.

A mile or so farther on we came to a path slipping off through the trees and a sentry at the head of it. We halted while the captain chinned in his terrible French with the sentry. We rested by the side of the road and looked over the wall into another clump of black crosses.

There was a big white one close to the wall with a lot of withered wreaths on it which looked black as ink in the moonlight.

All of a sudden somebody sang out, "Here's Jean Chabot's grave!"

We all crowded around and sure enough

there was carved on this big white cross, "Jean Chabot."

"Look here," shouted another, "here is a place for you Chabot, all ready to move in!"

There was a big laugh, and Chabot came up, looking as stupid as an ox. He gasped a bit and I think he turned a shade greener in the moonlight. Of course, it was no worse than for a John Smith in this country to find the grave of some other person of that name; all the same it was a bit spooky to come across it with the moon shining so and the guns muttering up ahead.

We fell in then and started off across a field through the soft earth, in single file, with a long line of goblinlike shadows marching alongside us.

Things were pretty quiet except for an occasional drum roll of machine gun fire up ahead, punctuated by the boom of the French battery behind us. We must have been pretty close to the front, when there was a roar like an express bearing down on us.

"Lie down!" yelled the captain and down we went like a row of kid's blocks. The roar passed over our heads; about twenty yards to the rear there was a big *plop* as a shell buried itself in the earth and there followed a pause while you could count three.

Then there was a big flash of light with a twisted tree trunk right in the middle of it and the whistle of shell splinters flying off over our heads. After that earth fell like rain. Nobody was hurt and we were on our way again in an instant. Somebody yelled, "Drop us another card, Bill."

As soon as I was on my feet, I saw a dark shadow on the ground crawling off to the rear. I was last man in line and almost passed it up as being nothing but a shadow, but then I thought it might be one of the boys laid out by that shell. So I stepped out of line.

Here was this Chabot just getting to his feet to run to the rear.

"Look here, Chabot," I said, hauling him to his feet, "if any one but I had found you, you would be a dead man now. Fall in here!"

"Did you see my grave up there on the road?" he asked, "that was for me."

He was shaking all over like a leaf, and his eyes were rolling like a scared animal's.

I slipped off the safety catch on my gun and said, "You have just three seconds in which to fall in. There are a million Jean Chabots in France."

He fell in ahead of me and marched along. All night long he squatted in the dugout, and the next day when he was put on sentry duty at a loophole, I had to keep after him or he would have been lying down in the trench all the time. I do not know why I took so much pains with that man, unless, as I have said, it was because I had the same interest in him that a teacher in a reform school might have in the star inmate.

Also, as I have said, he was absolutely alone in the world.

That one shell was the only disturbance we had that night, or indeed all the time of our first shift at the front line. We marched back to quarters a bit hysterical at the relief of having done our first turn without any casualties.

The days after that were days of the most perfect weather I have ever seen, with a lot of soft sun and a sky blue as porcelain. It was just cool enough so that we could stroll about the country without inconvenience.

I started out one afternoon walking along the road aimlessly. I saw Chabot ahead of me plodding along in his slow way. All of a sudden he stopped, looked over the wall, and then climbed over. I came along slowly switching the docks that grew by the road with a swagger stick and thinking that war was vastly viliñed. When I came to the place where Jean had gone over the wall, I looked over. He was standing by the big white cross that had his name on it.

A Frenchman was there, too, puttering about, pulling weeds away from graves. This grave of Chabot's namesake was all clean and well taken care of.

"Hello, Jean Chabot," I said, "come up to see your future home?"

It was a fine home all right. At the foot of the cross was a little glass-covered case with the ribbons and bronze of three decor-

ations in it and a photograph of the hero. Chabot was down on his knees looking into the box, and I squatted down too. Blame me, if those two did not look alike! The same helmet, the same dark eyes set wide apart, the same cheek-bones, the same mustache.

The old Frenchman came up.

"*Pardon,*" he said, "did I hear one of the *messieurs* addressed as Jean Chabot?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "That is our Jean."

"May I have the privilege of taking by the hand one of the same name as the great hero?"

The old man spoke good English, better English than any American. Once in a while he had trouble with his *th* and pronounced it with the sound of *z*; otherwise he was O. K.

Jean got up and stood like a dumb schoolboy, while the old man removed his hat and shook Chabot's hand as though he had been a king at least.

He was a funny looking old boy, fat, with very thin legs wrapped in puttees. They seemed to bend under him whenever he walked. One of them was injured in some way, and so he stood resting one foot on the other and swaying like a big tulip in the wind.

He had the oval continental glasses dropping off on each side of his nose and a gray beard stained with the smoke of cheap cigars. He was puffing away on one then —one of those skinny French smokes that no American will ever learn to like.

"Ah, he was a great man," sighed the Frenchman, "he was one hero."

"What are the decorations?" I asked.

"*Croix de guerre, médaille militaire, legion d'honneur,*" he said, "he had no relatif, so they were put here."

"Tell us about it," I suggested.

I perched on the wall, the old Frenchman eased his leg by leaning against the stones, Chabot sat with his back to us looking out over the broad valley at our feet. The ground dropped away across the little clump of black crosses to a broad flat of green country, crisscrossed by old earthworks which the grass was clothing with new green. Down the middle of the valley wound a stream, along its edge the eternal border of poplars. They also marked the white roads that cut across. There were clumps of what had been white walled villages, most of them with church spires which were now nothing but naked rafters. Everything was there, except the animals; no cows grazing by the brook; no horses working in the fields.

"*La belle France!*" sighed the old man, "*la belle France!*"

Looking out on a scene like that, I could understand how the *poilu*, defending it, is considered to be the best soldier in the world.

"First there was the *croix de guerre,*" began the old man. "There was a *boche* battery off to the north. Day by day it fires, killing our brave *poilus*. Day by day our batteries search. They do not find it, this German battery.

"One shell from it falls defeecient—in front of the trench where Jean Chabot is stationed.

"What does he do? He crawled out in the night and brings back this shell from the German which had not exploded. I need not tell warriors such as *messieurs* that on the tip of the shell is a ring which gives the time which it shall be in the air before exploding.

"After our officers have seen this time, it is easy to figure the distance to the *boche* battery for they know, of course, the speed at which the projectile flies.

"It has always been a matter of regret to me, *messieurs* that I was not the artillery officer who put the battery on ze bum."

Nothing pleases a foreigner so much as to slip over a little American slang on Americans. The old man wheezed a bit and I *ha-haed* some encouragement and he went on.

"It was a 330 millimeter battery that did it, I think *messieurs*, which would be twelve and half inches in English."

"Great!" I said.

Chabot said nothing, but he listened hard with the first expression of any interest on his face that I had seen since the time he thought the colonel was going to throw him out of the army.

The Frenchman's cigar had gone out and he lighted it with a sulfur match which

smelled only a little more abominable than the cigar.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME ANCIENT HISTORY.

"THEN there was the matter of the sugar mill. Over there, *messieurs*, stood a mill with a tall *cheminée*. It is gone now. *Messieurs* may see the remains.

"Jean Chabot crawls up inside of the *cheminée*, so." The old boy put his back against the wall and his feet against a tree and hitched himself up a few inches.

"Once there he removes the bricks to make a standing place and pulls out other bricks for a loophole. All day he stands there with a telephone and obsairves, to the great advantage of our troops. For that he was given the second medal.

"He was offered promotion, but he would not take it. He prefaired to be simply Jean Chabot, soldier of France."

Just then down the road came a company of French infantry, marching with that quick, springy step which gives them such a snappy appearance. They had a pair of buglers with them and they came swinging along to some quick call that rang in the quiet afternoon. The old Frenchman turned and took off his hat; I saluted.

When they passed the grave of Jean Chabot, they came to attention and gave the dead hero the marching salute. I turned around, and here was the live Chabot standing with his hand up at the stiffest salute he had ever made.

After the infantry came a battery of seventy-fives, rolling along with harness jingling, horses groomed, carriages newly painted a light blue that faded out as they went away down the road. It was certainly a fine sight and I could understand why the tears were coursing down the old man's cheeks.

"Ah, *messieurs*," he said. "*la belle France*.

"Then there was the matter that brought Chabot the *legion d'honneur*," he went on. "Several kilometers up the line there is the quarry country where Jean Chabot was born, as you, *monsieur*, undoubtedly know."

Jean nodded, although I do not see how he knew anything about it, or why the old man should think that he did.

"The *boche* were very strong there. They have made the quarry impregnable, *messieurs*, quite. But they have forgot one small tunnel which comes from the quarry through the hill and out into No Man's Land. It is a hell of a place, No Man's Land, *n'est-ce pas, messieurs?*"

He grinned again at knowing a little United States.

"Oh, not so bad," said Jean Chabot, who had not even looked at it through a periscope.

"Chabot knew of this tunnel, and one night he crawls out and burrows, for the *boche* have blocked it up. All night he burrows and the next and the next with some *camarades* for help. In time they open it all but a little. Then he goes out with a machine gun strapped to his back and six *camarades* with miles, *literalment*, miles of ammunition, wrapped about their bodies.

"*Messieurs*, you are soldiers, and I need not tell you what happens when the attack is from the front and from the rear. *Napoo!* The place is taken.

"All but Chabot died in that attack. They were brave men, *messieurs*."

"And how did he die?" I asked.

"Alas! *monsieur*, of his own generosity! There was a *bleuet*, what you call a rookie, fresh from Paris, only a boy of sixteen. He was *nerveux* to an extreme. I need not ask *messieurs* if they know the grenade. You knock it on the musket so, and count one—two—and throw.

"Am I right in supposing that it explodes five seconds after being struck as I have said?"

"About that," I nodded.

"This rookie, he strikes it against his musket and then drops it. All his *camarades* are gathered about. As for the *bleuet*, he breaks down and weeps. Jean Chabot falls on the grenade. But ah, even so, he was clevaire. He has his pack on his back and he falls face upward. But even

that will not save him. He died, *messieurs*, with the hand of the rookie in his. The young man would have shot himself, but Chabot said, "Not until you have killed enough of the *boche* to make up for me! *Ma jois*, *messieurs*, he knew that would take a lifetime of killing.

"*Messieurs*, it is getting late. See, the aeroplanes are flying homeward." And they were stringing across the valley like a flight of gnats, flashing in the sun.

"Jean Chabot's soul went to paradise, for he was a good man, and all men loved him."

The old boy stopped to blow his nose and wipe his eyes. I was not ashamed to show a little emotion myself. Chabot sat as stupid as ever.

"I am very, very pleased to have met one of the same name as the great man," he said, taking Chabot's hand in both of his. "Is it that you are a relatif to him?"

Chabot got up and stood with his hand in the old man's. His face was emotional.

"Yes," he said finally, "he was my uncle."

"The devil he was!" I started to butt in, but Chabot gave me a sort of pathetic look, so I kept still.

"Ah," said the Frenchman beaming, "then I am sure, *monsieur*, that the glorious tradition of his family will be upheld. Were you born in America?"

"Yes," said Chabot, "my father came over from France. He was the brother of this Jean Chabot. He was Henry Chabot. I was named for my uncle."

"You lie like a diplomat," I said under my breath, but nothing aloud, for after all, it was none of my business if he wanted to adopt a dead hero. It was the only thing he could do to get a family ready made.

The old man said, "I am very very pleased to have met one of his line. If you will do me the honor I shall be glad to welcome you in the second house after the turn of the road. Before the war I was a teacher of English in the academy here. Now my people are learning it first hand."

With that he lifted his hat and bowed and hobbled off down the road.

"Gee whizz! Chabot," I said to him, "you can invent a lot of stuff all right."

Blame me, if the tears were not running down his cheeks.

"He was my uncle," he said and that was all I could get out of him. There was one chance in a thousand that he was, of course, but Chabot was taking a long shot on that chance.

CHAPTER V.

CHABOT FINDS HIMSELF.

AND then on the way home, he discovered his rifle. Do you know how a man can go by something every day for twenty years and not notice it at all? That is what he had been doing with that rifle of his—just packing it around like so much dead weight and hating the job of cleaning it. He never would do it right unless I stood over him and directed him, beginning with:

"From the breech, you boob!"

Here we were walking along in the soft light, and he stroking the good, brown stock, running his hand up and down the sling, patting the barrel and drawing beads on the birds that fluttered in the branches. He slid the bolt back and forth a dozen times, grinning like a boy.

"What the devil!" I said.

He looked at me with a human look.

"Ain't she a beauty," he said.

"Sure, she is," I said to him and I do maintain that a good piece of ordnance is about the most beautiful thing in the world.

He went on playing with his rifle and looking as though he were about to kiss it.

"Chabot," I said, "you will make a soldier yet. The first thing he has to learn is to love his gun."

We marched on home. Instead of plodding along like beef on its way to the market, he marched with a lot of spring. He went all through the manual of the bayonet on the way home.

Between the beauty of the day and the story of the great man of his name whom he had adopted for uncle, that boy was converted just as sure as any man who ever hit the sawdust trail.

One day after that I met Chabot coming out of the village where our friend lived

who had told us all about the exploits of his adopted uncle. There was a string of people following him and the old man himself was walking along with Chabot. About a hundred yards up the road they stopped and all shook hands with Jean. They were children mostly, half grown boys, and one or two old men. I did not get the French very well, but I made out that Jean had been there for some kind of celebration, and they were all glad to have met the nephew of the great man.

I walked back to camp beside him. He would not say much, but he certainly looked happy. When we got back to camp, it had somehow or other got around that Chabot was saying that he was a nephew of some great Frenchman by the same name. A yell went up when Chabot hove in sight and the boys drifted over to kid him a bit.

"Say, Chabot," said one, a husky corporal who stood about a head higher than Chabot, "what relation are you to this hero up on the hill."

"He was my uncle," said Chabot.

"The devil he was," replied the corporal with a big laugh.

"He was my uncle," said Chabot, slow and careful.

This corporal took one look at Chabot's face. It was white, but ready for any kind of action.

"Well, all right," said the corporal in a friendly way, "I guess he was. That's fine."

The next day we went up to the front line again. It was quiet, which does not mean that any one could parade along the parapet.

Any kind of movement on our side brought a storm of bullets whining overhead. At five-fifteen every day there came about six shells from some big German battery in the rear. Funny that they should send them every day at the same time. But that was the time that reliefs were usually brought up and I suppose they figured that they might pick off a few. Of course we only changed the time of the relief and everybody ducked into a dugout when it came time for the party. But we had to leave a sentry or two out.

They got four of them with those shells. It was very annoying, too, because the shells were very accurately placed and it meant doing a lot of shovel work, which your American hates.

This day we were all outside enjoying the air before the five-fifteen strafing. All of a sudden a rifle grenade came whirling through the air and dropped at the mouth of the dugout. We all sat there paralyzed and this big corporal who had always kidded Chabot broke down and wept right there.

It lay there in the sun, a little zinc colored thing, and we all sat and watched it. Any one who jumped over it to get out had a fine chance of getting his legs blown off.

Then all of a sudden the thing disappeared under Chabot. He fell on it—back down, as his great prototype had done. It certainly showed a big change in him—a soldier is a man whose sense of honor is just a little stronger than his sense of fear.

Chabot was scared, all right; his face was white, and he lay there with his eyes closed, while we all sat around like mutes at a funeral.

It took about a second for this to happen, but I did a lot of thinking. The grenade, for some reason or other, did not go off, and Chabot finally opened his eyes and dragged himself to his feet, and we all laughed and slapped him on the back and called him a hero.

"You'll beat your uncle yet, Jean," I said to him.

But he said nothing; just went back to a loophole that he patronized pretty freely and looked out into No Man's Land. It was not an inspiring view out there. There was a little knoll, about ten feet in height, with two blasted tree stumps sticking up.

There had been a lot of fighting around it in the early part of the war, and around the base of this little knoll were some shapeless humps that were now almost grown over with grass. Our trench ran through ground where a lot of brave men were buried.

This same corporal who was always after Chabot was digging a niche in the wall for his pack one day, and he came across a

green and moldy skull. He laughed loudly and became violently sick.

After that Chabot was a hero. It got around to this French village about his falling on the grenade, and the old man who had been teacher of English came out with a wreath.

"For the worthy heir of a great name," he said, and placed the thing around Chabot's neck. Some of the boys laughed a little, for an American does not think much of ceremony, although they respected the old man very much. But Chabot just turned around slowly and looked each one in the eye for about a minute, and there were no more laughs.

After that he went off to the village and spent most of the night there having his hand shaken. It appears that his uncle was a great joker as well as fighter, and Chabot was gathering up all the lore about the funny things he said. This kept him in the village most of the time, at the English teacher's house.

After his exploit with the grenade every one thought that he would undertake any dangerous mission. We were all lined up, ready to go to the front line one day, when the captain said:

"I should like to call for volunteers to go out as a listening patrol to-night. There will be six men under a lieutenant. The work will consist of crawling up to the enemies' positions and trying to see what work is going on there."

Well, the whole company moved forward except Chabot. He alone was standing in the old line when the captain had finished speaking. However, he had earned a right to pick his place, and the rough knighthood that had been conferred on him did not suffer.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FINAL EXPLOIT.

"JEAN," said I, when we were marching up the road, "what's the dope?"

"My uncle," said he, looking defiant as he always did when speaking of him, "never went out to listen; he went out to kill!"

All the same, he disappeared that night. I did not see him go out, and he must have gone after the others left. All I know is that he was not in the trench for a long time.

We were all on edge waiting for the listening patrol to come in. Some one crawled up to the edge of the trench and whispered: "Don't shoot!"

"Give the countersign," said I in the same whisper.

It was Chabot coming back, and he did not know the countersign which we had arranged with the listening patrol. He must have recognized my voice, for he said: "My uncle."

I let him in on that, and over the edge he came in the dark. He went into the dugout, all bent over. When all the men were back I went in after him, and he had a big German shell there for a souvenir of his trip. It was about equal to our four-point-seven.

"Where did you get it—and why?" I said to him.

"It is a dead shell from the German battery that has been bothering us," he said with the old stupid look on his face.

"You certainly do take after your uncle!" said I; "exploit number two!"

All the time he had been watching for a dead shell to fall, so that he could get it in.

"Too bad there is not a factory chimney around or a quarry. You will have to take substitutes for those."

There was an American howitzer battery behind us, and we telephoned that night about the shell. They sent a man over right away who took the shell away with him, and we were glad enough to get rid of it.

These boys could hardly wait until daylight to begin firing. When it was light enough for an observer they started in, firing in salvos of four shots with about three seconds between each shot. We lay in the trench and listened to the shells roaring away over our heads.

There was a ridge behind which the German battery was concealed, so that we could see nothing but a cloud of orange smoke when the shell burst and a cloud of lamb's wool, when shrapnel went off.

They kept that up for about fifteen minutes when German shells came dropping back. Then on our fifth round there was a roar back of the ridge and a cloud of white smoke stood up like a thunderhead with bits of flying timber. We let out a yell and so did the men from the howitzer battery.

They had dropped a shell into an ammunition dump. After that we were at peace at five-fifteen every day.

For that the company was commended, although Jean Chabot was not, for he had gone out against orders. All the same, the captain announced one day that Jean Chabot was to be a corporal.

Chabot went up to the room in the barn which was the captain's headquarters and stood at attention.

"Yes?" said the captain.

"If you please, sir," said Chabot, "I had rather not be a corporal."

"Why not?" asked the captain.

I could have told him. Chabot's hypothetical uncle had refused promotion.

Chabot said: "I prefer to be Jean Chabot, soldier of America." Which was almost word for word what his uncle had said.

"If you wish it, it shall be so," said the captain, and Chabot had a day or two extra leave which he spent in the village with his friends. I understand he got quite a cheer when he marched into town.

After that *boche* battery had been put out, we had everything quiet for a week. Then Kaiser Bill and Mr. Hindenburg decided that A Company needed a little shaking up.

We were all sitting around in the dugout, playing cards or reading, except three men out as lookouts. Among them was Chabot. There was a lot of sun that day, and on the back edge of the trench a field mouse jerked around, hunting for the crumbs which we usually put out.

Two of the men from the country were arguing about the respective merits of their respective and respectable small towns.

"Clinton has eight miles of paved streets," said one.

"The devil you say!" said the other; "there are not eight miles in all Clinton!"

"Well, now—" started the other. But he never finished.

There was a roar across the way and a shrapnel shell burst perfectly thirty feet above the trench. The boy from Clinton went down. That argument was finished in paradise, as far as he was concerned. The other lad crumpled up with a shrapnel ball through his shoulder.

That was only a starter. After it came a flight of shell that burst on impact. In about fifteen minutes the place looked like an excavation with a dozen cave-ins.

From somewhere out of the blue materialized a flight of planes with black crosses on the lower surface of their wings. They circled above, like wasps, shooting out jets of red, yellow, and black smoke which meant something to the artillery. The posts that held up the wire were leaning crazily, and great strands of the wire itself curled up, leaving the path open when the charge should come.

Chabot was hugging the trench on a firing step, his eye glued to a reflector mirror.

We could not stand that long. It was a question of getting support, or taking the few of us left whole back through a communicating trench. But there was a curtain of bursting shell back of us to prevent our doing that very thing, and we had to lay out our wounded in the dugout.

One machine gun was struck squarely and vanished in a shower of flying steel. The other was buried, and with it two of its crew. Chabot was off his firing step in a moment, digging out the gun. Once he had it out, he dragged the ammunition from the other up and piled it all.

Back of us the American pieces were opening—first the bark of the threes, and back of them the full-tongued roar of the howitzers. And back of that the slow thump of the new twelve-inch guns, firing from a distance of about ten miles.

There were exactly three of us left uninjured at the end of a half-hour: Chabot, the big corporal, and I. I took a look through the reflector mirror.

Across the way a greenish gray haze was forming over the ground, like mist over a marsh at sundown.

"Gas!" I yelled, and began pounding on

the big bell which served as gas alarm. Back of the line it was taken up in a long roar, bells and sirens carrying the warning miles back.

The shelling stopped, lifted rather and fell about thirty yards to our rear. We knew what was happening. That fire was to keep reserves back.

I ran about putting gas masks on the wounded men, while Chabot stood watching.

All of a sudden he turned to his big corporal.

"Follow me!" he shrieked. Up over the trench he went, dragging the machine gun after him. He pointed to the gray boxes of ammunition for the gun, and the corporal followed him, carrying two boxes.

"Chabot!" I yelled, "come back!"

By that time the masks were all on the men who needed them. God knows they were few enough.

I watched Chabot. It took a courage of the sublimest sort to go out there, for the machine guns were humming like motorcycles tuning up for a race.

Chabot ran crouching, with the corporal behind him, to that little knoll. Between him and the Germans was the gas. He stumbled once, and I thought he was down, but he was up again, running low.

Well, they reached it safely. But they had forgotten their gas masks!

That grayish green cloud came rolling on like a sleepy tide. I could not have got out there with masks for them before it came. I sat tight and prayed.

The cloud came nearer, following every little pit and depression in the ground. It rolled up to the foot of that little knoll, paused, and flowed about the foot of it!

Chabot had his gun up and was lying between the two tree stumps. He began firing.

By that time the gas was upon us, and I could see nothing but the spurts of flame from Chabot's gun and grotesque gray figures running through the mist. The sun gave back the gleam from bayonets. The breeze suddenly freshened; the gas lifted over the trench.

Out there was a long line of gray clad men, some still running, others lying, some standing still and looking about for the concealed death that was smiting them. For Chabot had them on the flank, and as they swept by the little knoll poured a devastating hail of bullets down their line. It was exactly as if they had run into a wire about knee height from the ground. They pitched forward, their guns flying ahead of them.

Two of them came running up the little knoll with rifles clubbed. Then it was that Jean's corporal rose and fought them with his hands.

One he killed with his own bayonet, wresting it from him. They went down, and the other stood over them with his bayonet in mid air, ready for a downward thrust.

There came a rifle crack and a cheer from the other end of our trench and he fell. Reserves were trickling in in a khaki flood.

Then Chabot stood up, waving his arms.

"Come on!" he yelled, and forward the boys went in a brown wave. I followed, for there were stretcher bearers now to look after the wounded. Just as we were sweeping past the knoll I got it in the leg, nothing more than a pinch at first, but it threw me down, and in about a minute it was enough to make me lie still and think of home and mother.

Chabot was standing there, waving his arms slower and slower, like a clock running down. All of a sudden he slipped down quietly and lay beside his corporal.

"Chabot," I said, "where are you hit?"

He opened his eyes and looked at me dreamily.

"I am not so great a man as my uncle," he said. His voice was weak, and the dark stain wetting his side told that he was done for.

"You are a greater man, Jean," I said, "for you have made a man out of yourself first and a hero out of that man!"

"There was the affair of the chimney," he said. "I could not find one."

"This makes up for the quarry stunt," I replied. "Chirk up, old boy, we could not bear to lose you!" I was weeping.

"He was my uncle," he whispered so low that I could scarcely hear.

"Of course he was," I said; "everybody knows it."

He pulled himself together and raised himself up with one arm over the gun. Our men had occupied the German trench, and across from it came a half-dozen gray clad men, with their hands up.

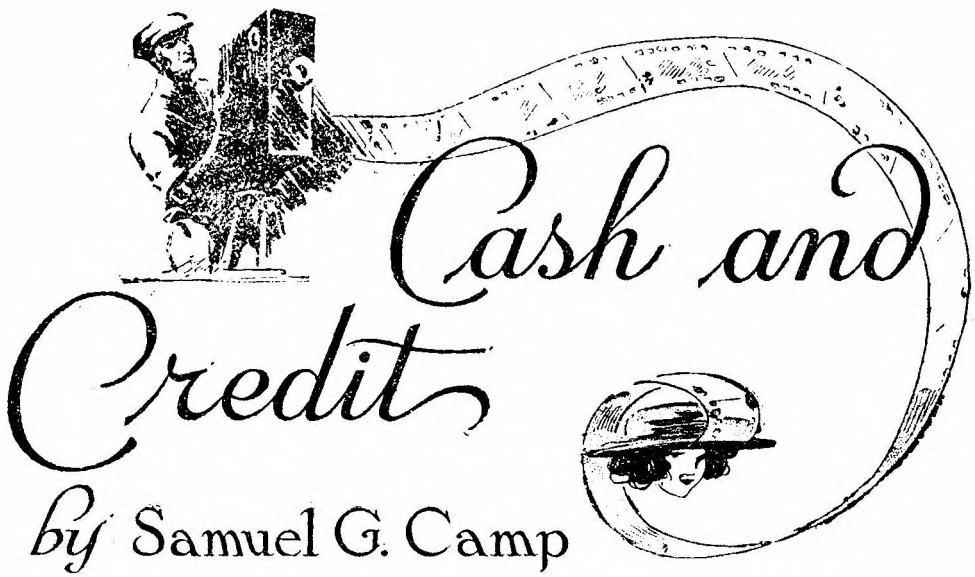
"Water?" I said to Chabot, and held out my canteen to him.

With infinite effort he took it and started to raise it to his lips. It was light, for most of it had run out while I was lying there.

He held it out to his corporal who was struck twice in the leg and was bleeding badly.

"Give it to him," he whispered. "My uncle and I shall drink wine in paradise!"

(The end.)



Cash and Credit

by Samuel G. Camp

I AIN'T never been what you might call exactly proud of this thing, and maybe it will do me good to get it off of my chest. Before I get through I guess you'll be able to see plain enough where I kind of put it over on somebody.

Still and all, I don't regret it none, because maybe if I hadn't of put it over the way I did—but at that, I'd be a whole lot easier in my mind if I had got the same results some other way.

No, I guess parts of this don't reflect no great amount of credit on yours as usual. And that ain't rightly so, neither; because if I hadn't of got the credit I wouldn't of got—but I guess the only way to handle this thing is to begin at the beginning and come clean all the way.

Credit—that's the gist of the whole business.

The other night the missis was reading to me out of a book which was wrote by a guy name of Homer K. Ham. I wouldn't be surprised if he was connected some way with the Armours or one of them other big firms in Chicago. Anyways, for a man living in Chicago, this was pretty good potery; and it goes a long ways to prove that genius ain't got nothing to do with a man's surroundings. A good man will come through most anywhere.

One of the things this Homer K. Ham says is something like this: "Take the cash and let the credit go." Of course they was more to it so as to make a rime, but that's the sense of it.

Now, that's all right so far as it goes. They ain't nothing to beat a cash business, and that goes for any place, and not only just for Chicago where this man, Ham, was probably most familiar with the conditions. Every year nine-tenths of the

business failures is due to bad bills; and Homer is dead right, like I said, as far as he goes.

But, believe me, they's times when it pays a man to hop to it and take both the cash and the credit. And that's what I done; though maybe the credit I took wasn't exactly the commercial kind. They's different kinds of credit, but in two respects they're all similar: hard to get and hell to hang on to.

At that, I don't take all the blame to myself. Gertie shouldn't never ought to of kept stalling me along like she did on account of them big ideas of hers. Only they wasn't her ideas, but she got them out of them fool books she was all the time reading; and if it wasn't a book it was a movie show. And I leave it to you if one ain't about as sensible as the other when it comes to taking them as anything like steady diet.

Of course they ain't no harm in reading a book wunst in a while, providing it's something sensible, like, for instance. "The Life of Battling Nelson"; and a movie show, too, is all right sometimes when you are tired and feel like a little nap would do you good.

But when you get so you got your face stuck in a book all the time, or so used to the screen stuff that real life don't look natural to you because they ain't no heroes and sheroes, except the men and women which is bringing up a fam'ly on one dollar a day, and the most of the villains is pinched without not even getting a chance to say "Ha!" or registering more than one-third of a cigarette—when you get that way it's time you took something for it.

And so, as I say, maybe I wasn't the only one to blame. They was several reasons why I was willing to be old married folks any time. And when you put them reasons all together they didn't spell Mother—they spelled Gertie, for short, and enough left over to make Gertrude easy.

But Gertie is shot so full of them crazy notions about romance, and all this and that, that they ain't nothing for it, but I got to have adventures and suffer and die for her before I can marry her.

And so that's the way it was, and I leave it to you what chance a man has to have adventures which is holding down a day trick on the street railway, barring now and then a run-in with somebody which is trying to hold out on you, or maybe handing his to a plain drunk. Believe me, I never could see no romance in playing showfer to a trolley car—and neither could Gertie. So it looked like I and Gertie was deadlocked.

And I guess we had to come to it sooner or later. Anyhow, we did.

When I called round to see Gertie that night, she wouldn't pay me not even the slightest attention till she had finished that last chapter. First off, I had a good mind to leave her flat; but then I see where that wouldn't get me nothing, because the chances was she was so interested in that book that she wouldn't even remember how I had been amongst them present, and so I grabbed the old man's paper and I took a hack at the sport news—and good and sore, too, let me tell you!

I was reading about this new middleweight, Fighting Phil Jackson, which was knocking 'em all kicking, when Gertie heaved a sigh which you could of heard out in the street and laid down the book.

She didn't say nothing for a minute, and so I says: "Well, I see where the Giants 'll make a straight cop next season. I guess that's going some, hey?"

Gertie didn't say nothing.

"But believe me," I says, "they'll find them White Sox is going to be just as tough a proposition."

No comeback from Gertie.

Well, I fished round a minute, and then I says: "Looks to me like Pershing is making a big hit with lettin' a redhead fire the first shot."

"Oh," says Gertie, "did you say something?"

"No," I says, "I only coughed—I got such a frog in my throat. I'm sorry I disturbed you."

"Gee!" Gertie says. "How I wisht I had lived when knighthood was in flower!"

I kind of let that settle, and then I

says: "Well, they should ought to be money in it yet. I see where the last quotation was eleven dollars and thirty-five cents against nine-thirty a barrel a year ago. If Hoover don't get busy I don't see how people is going to live."

"Just to think," says Gertie, "of all them splendid, handsome knights riding round on milk-white steeds, and wearing them shining suits of mail, and—and lancing each other, and everything."

"What was all them mail-carriers suffering from," I asts her, "boils?"

"But now, alas," (d'you get that?) "alas, the days of chivalry is gone," says Gertie.

"Yeh," I says, "them was the happy days."

"And the last of all them very perfect gentle knights is only nothing but a memory," says Gertie.

"Where d'you get that stuff?" I says. "I see where the very perfect gentle Knights of Columbus is giving a ball on the seventeenth; and yesterday I seen a big bunch of them very perfect gentle Knights of Pythias in a peerade; and—"

"And just think of them pitcheresque suits of armor!" says Gertie.

"Oh, fine!" I says. "It must of been great when they made your clothes and the hot-water boiler out of the same piece of goods, and your vest was interchangeable with the stove-lids, and the wife maybe boiling a cabbage in your best hat just when you wanted it in a hurry, you might know, and you can't find them new Sunday-go-to-meeting pants because the plumber thought they was a couple of sections of the new water-main sent round by the company, and he has went and buried them!"

"And—Jack Blinn, I think you are just horrid!" says Gertrude.

I guess the drift of them remarks of mine had only just reached her. Before that she was in a kind of trance.

Well, anyway, passing on, as they say, from there, I and Gertie touched at various points of interest till we reached what looked like the point of departure—for me. And I wasn't to come back, neither, not till I had fit and bled and died for Gertie. So it looked like I wouldn't be back for quite some time.

Understand me, I would of fit at the drop of a hat for Gertie any time—anybody, any time, any place. But I couldn't see where it was up to me to go and bounce one offen somebody which hadn't never offended me in no way, shape or manner, just because these authors has to make a living, and somebody—you can guess who—loses their goat and is bound to have knighthood flower whether it wants to or not.

This romance stuff is all right, only don't never forget to look at the calendar and see what year you are living in.

So I guess they was others to blame besides myself.

Well, it looked like it was all off between I and Gertrude, and you can lay a small bet that I didn't feel like starting no celebration, nor giving no three rousing cheers, nor burning no big bunch of red fire. But, just the same, I was good and sore at Gertie.

But they's no use crying over spilt milk, and you remember, like I did, that old one about how where's the sense in chasing a girl or a trolley-car because they'll be another along in five minutes. And so when I see Daisy, that day, I wasn't so all wrapped up in the past that I wasn't able to see right away that here was a girl which required immediate attention.

You know how it is: if you don't belong to the nobility, and ain't too stiff-necked about these here, now, orders of precedence, and formal introductions, and such, a little thing like that can be arranged without no great deal of trouble—provided, of course, the parties is agreeable. And in this case the results was able to speak for themselves, and practically what you might call instantaneous, and perfectly satisfactory.

In a couple of days I was paying Daisy whatever immediate attention I happened to have on hand, and I had my ropes out for a lot more which I expected to arrive any time. And a good thing, too, because I never see a girl which required more attention than Daisy.

Figuring up the attention I paid Daisy,

it come to forty dollars and thirty-four cents the first week—which, I bet you, is a lot more than it cost a man when knighthood was in flower. At that, toting up the general expense, if Daisy had lived back there when them tin suits was all the rage, and the only way you could show your regard for a lady was to go out and bean somebody with a battle-ax, or else spit him with one of them lances, I guess the losses would of been enormous, and the next census would of showed that knights was decreasing rapidly.

Maybe you get the idea. Daisy was that kind of a girl. She had speed, control, and everything. So I guess it's just as well that Daisy happened along in the present period of time, because, after all, them knights was pretty good old scouts, and when you had blowed eight dollars for theater tickets, and then fifteen for eats, Daisy was just as well satisfied as if you had bagged another knight for her—and, besides, I would of missed Daisy a lot.

As it was, I didn't miss nothing but them forty dollars and thirty-four cents.

And I only wisht sometimes when I was out with Daisy, that Gertie could see me now!

But she never did.

Well, things run along for a while, and then a couple of events come so close together that I ain't never been able to say whether they was what you might call independent or related happenings. Anyhow, my money give out and Daisy took up with another guy, or Daisy took up with another guy and my money give out—you can search me, and take your choice.

Of course Daisy might of noticed how I was tapering off a little; but, believe me, nobody ever stood the gaff better than me, and right up to the end—both ends, the hook and the old bank-roll. And, anyways, in a case like this a man which wouldn't give the lady the benefit of the doubt—provided they is one—is no gentleman.

And now that you mention it, it sure looked like this here was the end of the world.

Maybe it might of looked a little different if—well, I leave you three guesses who was the guy which had crowded me off the rail in the Daisy Handicap, and leave me to make the heavy going and run a mile wide on the turns, and you lose.

It was Fighting Phil Jackson.

But don't get the idea that I quit cold: nothing like that in the Blinn fam'ly. And, leave it to Daisy, she knowed the game, and she fixed it so I and this Fighting Phil never come together; and, if she hadn't of fixed things that way, no knowing what might have happened because, believe me, I wasn't afraid of this Fighting Phil Jackson, nor one dozen like him.

Of course I kept seeing in the papers how Jackson was winning his fights right along, and some of them fight experts says as how before long the champion will have to look out for Jackson because he is surely a comer, and how Jackson is considered the handsomest man in the ring—and so I knowed right then he wouldn't never amount to nothing—and so this Fighting Phil Jackson is surely some young hero, all right.

But maybe I didn't say that I wasn't no little stranger to this mitt game myself. Anyways, I had had the gloves on more than wunst, you bet, and so far I hadn't been up against nobody which could stay with me not for one minute. Us fellas had a set of boxing-gloves at the car-barn and, believe me, nobody ever ast me to put them on with him but wunst.

So if I and this Phil Jackson ever come together—and it couldn't come too quick to suit me—I guessed I would be able to take care of myself, and maybe I would get mine; but, take it from me, Fighting Phil wouldn't win no beauty contests, not for a while, though he might be the handsomest man in the hospital.

But I and Fighting Phil didn't meet up—not yet—because Daisy knowed the ropes all right, and wasn't taking no chances; and, in the first place, I wouldn't of found out who it was she was running round with, between times, if it hadn't of been for a friend.

Well, I suppose she had a right, so I didn't say nothing—much.

All I did was to borrow some money off a guy which thought he knowed me; and

so I was good for a while yet. Still and all—no I won't say it, but maybe I had a hunch now and then that Daisy should ought to marry one of these here munitions-factories and not no trolley showfer.

And still I never see nothing of Gertie. You see, Daisy wouldn't go no place lessen it set you back a fiver anyhow. But Gertie—Gertie didn't hardly go nowheres except to the movies. Some day, maybe, she would be a movie actress herself—so she said. You might know, what with them romantic notions of hers.

"Well," I says to Gertie, the time she pulled that stuff about working for the movies, "I guess for anybody which has the romance as bad as you it's the best thing you can do. It 'll either kill or cure, and in a case like yours you have to take a chance, like when they frisk you for your appendix. You got everything to win and nothing to lose—but the appendix. Because the way you are now the chances is you won't never be no better. And I only wisht I could go along and hold your hand. It helps. Lemme show you—"

Somehow I always did like Gertie. But now—

Well, it wasn't hardly no time when I had blowed that borrowed money on this little sketch, "Keeping Up with Daisy." And when the pay-check come along I knowed it wouldn't do me no good lessen I could stretch it, and so I followed one of them sure-fire racing-tips which come my way and shot the works on a bay mare name of Golf Ball; and I guess she must of had one of them acid cores and blowed up in the stretch and blinded the judges, because, anyways, they couldn't see where she win.

And so there I was, and no doubt about it. And they was something had to be done in a hurry. And the only thing which saved me from brain-fever was running across that notice in the paper.

As a rule I don't fall for none of this film dope which the papers is full of nowadays; but feeling like I was, it was a case of 'most anything to keep my mind off my troubles, and that night I was alone in my room at the boarding-house, and good reason why, and so I give that "News of the Movies" colyum the once-over.

Maybe it was the way the thing was headed which caught my eye. Anyways, it said:

WANTED:

A MAN WHO CAN TAKE A PUNCH.

Director Young, of the All-Star Film Company, at present engaged in filming Jack Linden's story of the prize-ring, "The Abysmal Brute," is experiencing no little difficulty in discovering some person hardy and foolish enough to absorb a genuine honest-to-goodness knock-out punch for mere pay—even as they pay in the movies.

The reason—one of them, at any rate—is not far to seek, inasmuch as it is generally understood (in whispers) that Fighting Phil Jackson, currently famous as the roped arena's prize beauty, and who, as it happens, bears a sufficiently striking—let it go—resemblance to Cyril Moore, who plays Mr. Linden's hero, will double for Mr. Moore in the ring scenes.

And Mr. Jackson packs a rather well-known punch.

We are pleased to help out Director Young to the extent of this notice. But, bear in mind, we accept no responsibility. Mr. Young's middle name is Realism—and the scenario calls for a sure-enough one, two, three, and so on, *knock-out!*

No professional divers need apply. Applicants must know how to box, and should apply in person, and at once, at the All-Star Studio.

Line forms at the right.

Now all you got to do to see things like looked to me is put yourself in my place, and you couldn't put yourself into no worse one. They wasn't nothing I would like better than to lay a glove on this Phil Jackson, unless it was money. And here is my chance to get next to both.

I'm all through with Daisy, lessen I can put it over this Jackson some way; and if I go up against him and get mine, like I probably will, anyhow I get paid for it; and, believe me, I need the money.

Besides, I know anyhow where Fighting Phil Jackson will know how he has been in another one before I get through with him. I guess you get the idea. Leave it to me, I wasn't going to absorb no knock-out, like the paper said, lessen I had to; though, of course, I wouldn't let on to nothing like that to this Director Young.

No, sir; I am going to knock this Jackson's head off if I can; and if I can't—well, then I wake up and collect.

Like Gertie's going into the movies, I got everything to win and nothing to lose.

So then, next morning, I get a man to take my run, because I am sick, and I get the address of this All-Star plant and beat it out there.

And—but never mind the details. I put it over.

"Is they going to be a rehearsal?" I asts this Director Young. I didn't want no rehearsal for pretty good reasons.

"No," he says, "no rehearsal. This scrap will differ from all screen fights and some regular ones; there'll be no rehearsal beforehand. I want this to be the real thing. When the time comes I want you to fight. D'you get me? *Fight!* As for the rest—leave it to Jackson!"

"Yeh," I says, "sure! And, now, how much for taking the tunnel?"

"H-m," he says. "How about a hundred net?"

"Whaddaya mean, net?" I asts.

"Oh," he says, "clear of all expenses like medical attendance and so on." He laughs. "And I'll tell you what," he says. "This Jackson bird has been out here a couple of times, strutting round the lot and telling me things about my business, and—I don't like his looks. I think you're going to deliver, and—listen: you hand him a couple of good swift ones for me, before you go out, and I'll make it fifty more."

"You owe me one-fifty," I says.

The date for the blow-off is set for a couple of days later, so as to give the director a chance to mobilize a bunch of extras for spectators; and so then I have to figure some way to get the afternoon off, without staying sick and losing my time, because I am surely going to need that next pay-check if I can land that old wallop only just wunst on this cheap pork and beaner, Jackson. Oh, you raving beauty!

And so right away I kill an uncle of mine which I have had it in for for some time, and this gives me a chance to bury him on the afternoon of the fight without no appearance of indecent haste. He didn't leave me no money, and so I had to make another touch to get out to the moving picture studio, lessen I walked it, and it was a long ways outside the city, and I knowed I had better save all my strength. Maybe I would need it.

When I showed up, this Director Young nails me as soon as he sees me coming, and is onto me like a wolf, and it looks like he's all excited up about something, but a fella tells me this is his natural condition when he is working. Anyhow, Young tells me everything is all set, and wheretel have I been, and to get a hustle onto me and get into my ring clothes; and when I ast him what did he mean, ring clothes, and I didn't bring none with me, I guess I missed the worst bawling out I ever got because he didn't have the time to give it to me.

But he give me a look which done just as well, and turned me over to another guy and tells him to take me to a dressing-room and run me into a pair of tights and things, and hang onto me and see that I didn't get away, and then rush me around to the fight set.

Well, the guy I was turned over to was just as crazy as the director, and before I knowed what had happened to me I was out of my clothes and into them fighting togs, and not even time to brush my hair, and hustled out of the dressing-room and raced round to what they called the fight set. And, believe me, anybody which wants to work for the movies is welcome. But if it was me, I'd rather have some slow job, like Barney Oldfield's.

It was just like coming into a place where regular fights is held—all except them overhead arcs and calciums and a kind of queer green light, and enough to put your eye out, and the spectators all bunched at one side of the ring, and some crowd, too, because this Director Young wasn't no piker. At the other side of the ring I see the camera-man fiddling with his box, and the director standing near him.

And talking to him, like it was a kind of favor, was Jackson, the proud beauty. He had a bathrobe throwed round him. I didn't have no bathrobe, but the dressing-room guy had dug me up one of them Navaho blankets which done just as well.

When I come up to them the director is onto me like a wolf, but it looked like I

wasn't no part of the landscape to Jackson. He didn't see me atall. Oh, well—

And so then the director introduces us, and it was just like shaking hands with a fish, and starts to tell us how about it. And it comes down to this: Forget the camera and—*fight!* The first man he catches pulling a punch—the camera stops and it's all off. No matter if the finish comes in ten seconds. But if the scrap runs over a full round, somewhere along in the second I am to just kind of telegraph how a left or a right-hand wallop is on the way from the floor—and leave it to Jackson to beat me to it!

That's what he said, but I knowed what he meant: Curtains!

"D'you get me?" the director asts. "Telegraph the blow. It could happen in any fight."

"Sure," I says.

"All right," he says. "Dwyer! Mitchell! Get in there!"

A couple of guys clim into the ring. They was the official announcer and the referee. "All right, Jimmie?" asts the director.

"All right here," says the camera-twister.

Then all of a sudden the director throwed up his arms, like a man going down for the third time, and starts shooting it into that bunch of extras. "Everybody in the game now!" he yells. "Remember this is no sacred concert! It's a fight! Interest! Enthusiasm! Excitement! Suspense! Get crazy. You, Blinn, climb in there and get introduced! Start shooting, Jimmie!"

I clim into the ring—I guess. But maybe I rode into it on a horse; or I might of fell into it out of a air-ship. Because, the way I was feeling right then, what with all the noise and the people, and them snaky green lights hissing and spitting at me, and all this excitement and suspense stuff, and everything, I couldn't even of told you my right name, not if you was to pay me for it.

But in spite of them lights I still had my eyesight. And it was whilst I was being introduced to the crowd that I see them sitting there right at the ringside and right next to each other—*Gertrude and Daisy!* Daisy was saying something to Gertie, and laughing. And Gertie was looking like she had saw a ghost.

It was the director which broke the spell; and I don't know how long he had been yelling at me when I began to hear him—like it was in a dream or maybe somebody way off in the distance.

"Take your corner, Blinn! *Take your corner!* Hey, Dwyer, for God's sake put him in his corner. We don't want a whole reel of this introduction stuff! All right! Now, Jackson! Everybody cheer Jackson! —fine!—seconds get busy—bandages!—gloves!—test the ropes, Jackson! You, Blinn, come out of it! Look alive! Register determination—fierceness! Get sore! You aren't here to hand Jackson a loving-cup! Remember what I told you! You know!—ready!—seconds out of the ring! —*bell!*"

It might of just kind of accidentally occurred to me that here was what you might call a situation, and not the kind you apply for, neither. But I didn't have no time to figure it out, except that Gertie had finally got her a job in the movies, working as an extra in this fight stuff; and that Jackson had brung Daisy out here to see him show off in front of the camera.

But, outside of wondering mighty hard what it was Daisy was saying to Gertrude, though it wouldn't make no difference because Gertie and I was all through, I didn't get no further, because, well, when that moving-picture slave-driver sings out "Bell!" I realized all of a suddent what I was here for, and now was the time, and here was the place!

I guess Jackson expected me to mitt him, like it's customary before beginning the hostilities. I would of did it if I had thought about it; but, you understand, I wasn't never educated in these polite ring tactics. And, I guess right there was the difference between me and Jackson: he was one of these regular scientific boxers which gets most of their stuff from working in a gym; and I, well, I ain't telling you nothing but the truth, I guess I ain't nothing more nor less than a natural-born fighter,

and strong as a bull, and not no end to the punishment I can take; and this old right of mine, well, it will get you if you don't watch out, and it don't never have to get over but only just wunst!

So I come out of my corner fighting, and Jackson hadn't hardly tooken three steps when we come together with a crash. I had the jump on him and I bulled him to the ropes; but somehow I couldn't seem to land on him not where it would hurt. I couldn't hit nothing but a elbow or a glove. He dove into a clinch and hung on till Dwyer broke us open.

Nobody hadn't said nothing about not hitting in the breakaways, and so I didn't —I swang one at his head and missed by a mile.

It begin to look like I was up against something a little different from what I was used to: when us fellas put on the gloves in the car-barn, 'most every blow that was started landed, and the man which could start the most and land them the hardest was the winner. But this guy, why, you couldn't not even hit him atall!

And maybe this Fighting Phil Jackson was the handsomest man in the ring, but you can take it from me he wasn't no classic beauty to look at not with his fighting face on! And, after the way I went after him, you can bet he was wearing it, and not no genteel smile of amusement like he started in with.

Right off the bat I started another rush, but this time Jackson is looking for me and sidesteps. Before I can organize another charge he's after me. Before this he hasn't laid a glove on me; but now it seems like the air is full of gloves, and a fist in each one of them, and I guess this man Jackson has more arms than one of them electric buzzers has wings, and believe me a man couldn't no more keep track of them different arms than you could tell them wings apart when the current's on!

Well, I see where this ain't getting me nothing, because he is hitting me practically *Aunt Libbietum*, like they say in the colleges, though they didn't not one of them blows hurt me, not till afterwards, and so I cover up the best way I can and bore in on him—and got over them two for the director and a couple more for myself, but they didn't seem to slow him up none to speak of; not no more, say, than a through express slows up for a flag-station. They wasn't nothing but body blows, and so far I haven't saw no chance to get that old haymaker over.

And so then they was a little more of this infighting, and I guess the results was about horse and horse, till Jackson went into another clinch and Dwyer pried us apart, and then Jackson has me where he can pull some more of this scientific stuff—and if he would only stand up to me like a man and swap punches, you bet I would show him a thing or two, and I guess it would be a different story, and we would see; but the way things is, a man can't get no sort of satisfaction, and if this is what you call fighting, why, all right, and you are welcome to it.

And they ring the bell on me just when I'm sending home another charge, and beginning to see out of one eye, because the other is closing rapidly, that it's hard to beat a man at his own game—and I can't get this dancing master to play mine!

And so then I have one minute in which to consider kind of dreamily how it looks like Daisy is lost to me now, as well as Gertie—and what d'you suppose it was Daisy said to Gertie? But, cheer up, with a job and one hundred and fifty bucks a man may go far! Though I don't get that one-fifty lessen Jackson can defeat me, now, conclusively; and so far he ain't done nothing but peck at me and hasn't landed not one good solid blow.

"Gee!" says one of them seconds, whilst they was fussin' over me and fanning me like I was an old woman in a fit or a faint or something, "gee! I guess them English 'tanks' ain't got nothing on you! He hit you with everything but the water-bucket and never touched you!"

"Him?" I says. "*Hit?* He didn't hit me none. It ain't polite to haul off and hit a man not when they're one-stepping with you."

Well, they wasn't no use in admitting that this man Jackson had me going, maybe, and just because he wouldn't fight and I hadn't never tooken no dancing lessons.

But, just the same I knowed that I wasn't appearing to no great advantage before Daisy and—Gertie!

Right then, I guess, was when that idea hit me in the hair. But I didn't have no time to develop it because the bell rings and it's time to get in there again.

But if this thing works out, all is not lost—save honor.

Anyways, I'm fresh as a daisy now, and after this ring hero as strong as ever; but Jackson hasn't only showed me but one new step in the hesitation, and, I guess, is maybe just getting me framed up to where he can begin to operate on me again—oh, I might just as well hand it to him—when the director which is still in the game and has been right along, though I didn't pay no attention to him, begins yelling: "Now, Blinn, telegraph it! Telegraph it!"

This was something which had entirely escaped me.

Well, they say how everything becomes clear at last to a man which is about to die. Anyhow, the old bean wasn't never working better.

"Telegram for Mr. Jackson!" I says to myself. "Mr. Jackson!—Mr. Jackson!—Mr. Ja-a-a-ckson!"

And I sent it with one hand—and swang with the other!

It was whilst I was still kind of hovering round in the spirit world, kind of like a man stranded between the sea of unconsciousness and the land of reality, as you might say, when somebody says, like it was in a dream: "It beat anything I ever saw! A double knock-out as sure as you're a foot high! Jackson wasn't looking for that right and if he hadn't had sense enough left to hang onto the ropes and keep on his feet we'd of lost the film. He was out, clean, on his feet!"

It was the director. And so, then, I hadn't got nothing worse than a draw after all! And I come back to earth to hear about it.

Well, the director and this man Dwyer give me all the latest news, and I was glad to hear it, and then they went away from there and left the two of us together—because maybe I didn't say that this comeback of mine was under Gertie's personal charge, like holding my head in her lap and everything, and, believe me, she had them men stepping round like she was a major-general and they wasn't nothing but rookies.

And so then it looked a lot like that idea of mine was going to work out. But, first off, I ast her what was that girl saying to her just before the fight began.

"Oh," Gertie says, "she said she knew you, and you were a cheap skate, and she hoped Phil Jackson would trim you good! She struck me as being awfully coarse."

"Me, too," I says.

"D'you know her?" Gertie asts.

"I never!" I says. "But I might of thought so," I finishes up to myself, so as not to tell no lie.

"The hussy!" Gertie says—she's always getting off them kind of literary expressions.

And so then I says: "Well, Gertie, do I have to have more adventures and fights and things, or is this enough?"

"Jack," Gertie says, kind of awed-like, "did you do this for me?"

"Who else?" I says.

And so—well, and so that's what's worrying me. Right then was when I took the credit; and, like I said before, I'm sorry but I don't regret it. And of course I got the cash.

And if the missis ever gets the straight of it—well, I leave it to you what I get.

Master of the Hour

by Achmed Abdullah

Author of "The God of the Invincibly Strong Arms," "The Charmed Life," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

CAPTAIN STACY DAVIES, American soldier of fortune and member of the Foreign Legion, was sick to the soul of Africa, even though he meant to come back and marry Jacqueline Lagloire, daughter of the mayor of Froide-Fontaine, within a short time—a year at most.

And that same night Camposolo, the man who had gone Fantee—married a Touareg girl and was looked down upon equally by whites and blacks—crawled in at the western gate, mindless and fearfully tortured. He came to in time and told a horrible tale of having been caught by medicine-men, taken far to the south and subjected to four of five tortures before being sacrificed by the Master of the Hour—*M'yanu M'bi-likini*—who had gathered representatives of every tribe in all Africa together at the ivory juju-house for the purpose of causing Africa to rise and drive out the whites.

Worst of all the Master—who was veiled—had the mummy of a negro as the great fetish, and the Egyptian hieroglyphics proclaimed from the sarcophagus that this was not only the first king of Egypt, but Adam himself, the First Man—and a negro!

But Camposolo was rescued by a medicine-man whose life he had once saved with help of El-Mokrani the Arab slave-trader; and El-Mokrani elected to join with his nominal enemies the French in defense of the whites when the rising should come.

Came the day of the weekly market in Froide-Fontaine, and it coincided with the first day of the Fast of Ramadan. Consequently tempers were on edge. And when Jacqueline elected to bid in the market against Ben-Arbi, father of Nourah who had married Camposolo and lost caste, for a handsome bit of furniture, excitement ran high.

It was all good-natured, but— And Davies's foolish mistrust suddenly was justified. For winning the bit of carved oak at three hundred francs, Ben-Arbi stepped closer to the girl as though to make her an offer of it—and then El-Mokrani had leaped at the Touareg and felled him with his staff.

The resulting fracas was swift, violent, and bloody. Davies saved Jacqueline, getting a slash across the forehead, and then Ben-Arbi and his men drew off and started for their own village. Just inside the gate he paused.

"Wait!" he cried, a deep, harsh sob in his voice. "Wait—for the Master of the Hour!" And he was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

ALARMS.

A cry over numberless graves, dark, helpless, and blind,
From the measureless past
To the measureless future, a sobbing before the first laughter,
And after the last! —ALFRED NOYES.

THE next day had its full quota of alarms and excitements, and Nature herself—rather unwarrantably, Davies thought—did her best to chime in with the emotional pattern of things.

For during the greater part of the twenty-four hours a thick, white mist oozed from the skies, like an immense shutter, smoothly, evenly, as if sliding in well oiled grooves. A shroud it seemed, punctured in orange and vermilion here and there by the flicker of some far camp-fire where a lonely desert rider was shivering for the return of the sun, the return of that Africa which was blue and golden and beautiful to behold.

No sound except once in a while the plaintive call of a jackal to its mate and a distant thumping of wooden drums—and

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

Froide-Fontaine seemed cut off from the rest of the world.

The colonists went about their work melancholy, dejected, homesick, cursing themselves for fools that they had ever left the peaceful slopes of Sicily and Malta for Africa's harsh-clanking gold; the blacks moved in uneasy groups, clicking and chattering, with oblique glances over their shoulders as if afraid of some especially vindictive juju.

The mayor, whose majestic bearing increased proportionately with the quaking of his inner self, sipped his absinth at the village tavern, where he held forth to some chosen cronies about the glory of the French Republic and the white blessings of peace.

Nourah, who had been in a state of abject fear ever since the scene caused by her father Ben-Arbi, clung close to Camposolo, who wanted to return to his tiny home in the Kwaja hills where, perhaps in memory of the days before he had gone Fantee, he had started a desperate but unsuccessful attempt at an old-fashioned French kitchen garden.

But she would not let him go.

"No, no, no, heart o' me!" she implored. "Thou must not go! I know my father—he is like the elephant whose cheeks are streaked with the marks of passion."

Camposolo remained, busying himself about the post.

Even El-Mokrani was affected by the gloomy atmosphere. He explained to Davies that his soul was shivering with the hopeless chill of the task—the task of combating the Master of the Hour, that grim, squatting force brewing dread mysteries in the south to the tune of the wooden drums; and when the captain told him with mock ferocity that he ought to be ashamed of himself—he, a pure-bred Arab, to show fear—the other shook his head slowly, morosely.

"Fear?" he echoed. "Not exactly that. But I remember the old Meccan prophecy about Arabia and Africa—the prophecy which says that the thin-shanked and woolly-headed ones from the Habash shall destroy the Ka'abah of Islam; that a host of warriors shall pass from Africa into Arabia in such multitudes that a stone shall be conveyed from hand to hand between Jeddah and Madinah—*al-haram ƒ' il Haraamayn*—'evil shall dwell in the Holy Cities,'" he wound up his cheerless quotation, and Stacy Davies, always honest with himself, and honestly trying to get at the bed-rock of his own emotions, knew that the trickle of expectancy which he felt running down his own spine was not exactly caused by joy.

But there was his duty as a white man in Africa. Too, there was Jacqueline.

"Never mind, old man," he said, and the bit of home slang clashed curiously against the other's flowery speech, "it 'll all come out in the wash," and he laughed.

Not that he liked danger. No man does. What he liked better, welcomed in danger was the chance to find himself—*for* himself—beyond what other men knew or could ever know of him.

The events of the day commenced in a typically African manner with a thing with no cause, no beginning—nor logical end, as it seemed at first.

Shortly after four o'clock in the morning, when the bastion sentinels were changing guard and when Davies was inspecting the post, quite suddenly, out of nowhere, a very loud cry, a cry of infinite desolation, soared slowly through the air—such a shivering and mournful wail as may be imagined to follow the flight of the last hope, the last love, the last decency from the earth; and the sheer unexpectedness of it, cutting out of that dead fog, made the captain's hair creep and caused El-Mokrani to clutch his friend's arm convulsively.

The cry trembled and stretched. It grew and bloated like a balloon filled with sinister anticipations. It seemed as if the fog, the night, Africa herself, were screaming in despair—"at what?" Davies asked himself. Then, with the same crushing suddenness, the wail stopped, cut off in mid air, and there followed an excessive silence, more appalling than the cry had been.

Just that: a long-drawn cry, followed by silence.

No sign anywhere. No threatening shadow looming through the mist. No

twinkle of killing steel stabbing the opacity. No physical, actual consequence to motivate, to explain. Just the cry—and the silence! One of those dumb, terrible African mysteries, clouted out of nothing, for nothing, because of nothing—like the loose ends of a tale with no climax to tie them, like the words of a grim jest without a point.

One of those African secrets that baffle probability.

"Gad—what's up?" The captain turned to El-Mokrani, who shook his head.

"Allah knows, and at times I wonder if He does—"

His words were drowned by a great commotion from the bastions where the sentinels, unnerved by the wail, were dropping a few isolated shots into the night. The plopping ring of them sounded foolishly inadequate, like shooting at a continent with a pea-shooter.

A few minutes later the silence was once more shivered; this time by the morning song of the drums — *rub-dub-dub* — with sudden staccato pauses and muffled beats, like exclamation points. When Davies, who hated the sounds as something physically repulsive, turned to go back to the comparative quiet of his quarters, El-Mokrani stopped him with a gesture and a whispered "Hush—keep quiet, for the love of Allah!"

"Wh-why?"

"I know their code—I can hear—" and the Arab threw himself down, his ear pressed against the ground, every nerve of his body quivering with excitement; once in a while giving a low exclamation.

The drums ceased their talk. El-Mokrani turned to the American with a few sharp words:

"Are you sure?" asked the latter, and the answer came quick and dry: "Yes—he alone—waiting there—"

"But—but why should he be *alone?* Why should he be in the Kwaja hills? Where are the Touaregs? Have they returned to their village? Are you sure that—" The captain's questions tumbled over each other, and before El-Mokrani could reply the drums thumped out again.

"Listen!" And thump for thump, pause for pause, beat for beat, the Arab interpreted their talk to Stacy Davies:

Rub-rumbeddy-rub! "The same message as before," whispered the Arab—*rub-rub—ban-n-ng*—then a trembling pause, and they began again. "'The Master of the Hour has come north. He awaits the chiefs of the outer villages. Let them come, one by one, bringing good talk. The Master waits in the Kwaja hills. He has pitched his tent below the rock which is called the Tooth of Time. He sits alone, proud, fearless. His hand is heavy and strong. He is a wild-cat devouring his own young. Thus, will he let the rats escape? Let the chiefs come, one by one.'"

Ban-n-ng! The hollow sounds wailed into silence, and El-Mokrani broke into low laughter.

"Alone he sits? Ai! I shall keep him company in his proud loneliness!" He flung away through the fog toward the black tents of his Sennussi, which topped the parade ground like gigantic mushrooms.

"I'll go with you, El-Mokrani!" cried Davies, but the Arab shook his head.

"No, heart of my heart, this is work for mine own people. Four men is all I need—four men who know the bush, the desert, the jungle," he said triumphantly, and he picked them with great care.

"Jehan Shujah! Hajji Hossayn! Sunda Shah! Al-Shaitan!" He called them by name, and the four men stooped out of their tents, rubbing their eyes and, when their chief had told them why they were wanted, grinning like schoolboys on the eve of a holiday, with a long prospect of bully scrapes.

The first two were typical wiry Bedouins; Sunda Shah was an Egyptian with the soft, feline tread and the soft, feline gestures of the Nilote; while Al-Shaitan was a pure-bred negro, who, ever since his conversion to Islam, had been noted for his ferocious hatred of his brother blacks, and who lived up to his nickname—the Demon—by his thoroughly unscrupulous manner of fighting.

Altogether a choice handful of ruffians, El-Mokrani explained to Davies, as they went among the pickets to choose their horses.

"I shall bring you the Master's head to season your supper," the Arab laughed over his shoulder as the jingling cavalcade rode out of the western gate into the sluggish mist, which swallowed them like a sea of tossing white.

Stacy Davies had full confidence in the Arab's ability to live up to his boast. Once more he began making plans for the future; plans which had Jacqueline for a central figure—and when temporarily the oozing fog rolled away and the rugged desert, dull-red under the rising sun, swung arrogantly into the focus, his gloom lifted like gauze in a wind.

He told himself that, with the Master of the Hour dead or captive, the whole conspiracy would collapse like a house of cards. Africa was not a unit—Africa was chaos, powerless without one man to guide her destinies—a single man, a black Napoleon, who could whip her dull, crunching energies into flame with the steel of his eloquence and the strength of his soul.

Such a man was born only once in a century—a man like Lo Bengula, like Chakka the Zulu, like Mohammed Bello the Fulah, whose great black empire had once covered the land from the Gold Coast, across the Sahara, to Froide-Fontaine and beyond, to far Darfur.

Davies smiled. Mohammed Bello's tomb at Sokoto was still a place of pilgrimage to the desert Fulahs. Let the Master's tomb be one to the southern blacks—after the Master had been buried in a neat French convict cemetery; and, still smiling, he invited himself to breakfast at the mayor's where, right under the nose of her fuming parent, he made shameless love to Jacqueline.

The girl was loquacious, and in high good humor. The stage coach was due to arrive this morning, and she expected letters from her former convent chums in France, and a large box filled with strictly feminine frills which she had ordered from the Bon Marché.

"Stacy, dear," she said, "you will be surprised. A gown of deep-rose charmeuse—ah! it will blend well with the desert sunset. I shall wear it to-night." Altogether, in spite of the mayor's frowns, the meal was pleasant and the captain would have prolonged it beyond the point of exact etiquette had he not noticed, looking through the open window, that his Spahi orderly was walking up and down in front of the house, looming ghostly through the fog which was again beginning to fall, and evidently trying to attract his attention.

The orderly had been with Davies for over three years, and the latter knew the man's tact—an almost feminine tact which clashed incongruously with his savage courage; and he understood at once that something vitally important must have happened—something, moreover, which the Spahi was unwilling to mention before the girl.

Davies looked at his watch. "Heavens!" he exclaimed, "half past seven—I'm late for stable inspection." The white lie came glibly enough, and he buckled on his saber, kissed Jacqueline's hand, and left the house.

"What is it?"

The Spahi pointed silently toward the part of the bastion which squatted above the eastern caravan road—the Darb el-Sharki, as the Touaregs called it.

Faintly through the whitish-lavender mist Davies saw a knot of people and heard a commingling of low, excited voices.

He hurried over. The crowd—Chasseurs d'Afrique and Spahis—saluted and gave way. Only one man remained—Camposolo.

He was leaning over something dusty and crimson-stained and very tiny, which lay before him on the ground. He looked up at the captain's approach, pointing at the stark thing.

"Ayuwá!" he whispered laconically. "The Ticki-Ticki—the dwarf medicine-man who gave me warning—who afterward sent El-Mokrani to my rescue!" And with a dry sob in his voice he added: "Murdered — murdered by those — those southern swine!"

"God!" Davies stooped. He looked at the tiny corpse—curled up like that of a poisoned dog. It seemed ridiculously small, like a smashed, brittle toy. A silly smile was on the broad mouth which gaped open with a flash of pointed teeth—a smile con-

tradicted by the look of intense horror in the staring, glassy eyeballs, rolled up in palsying agony.

He still had the gorgeous paraphernalia of his craft about him—the pink parasol, the dilapidated high hat, now sadly battered out of shape—the whole quite typical of Africa, where even death is without dignity.

"How did he get here? Who killed him?" Davies asked of the crowd in general, and Camposolo broke into hysterical laughter.

"He was flung across the wall during the night as a little message of love and goodwill from the south—from the Master of the Hour. Look, captain!" He drew the goatskin across which covered the tiny, tortured body aside. "Look!"

Davies looked. On the chest, just below the heart, a voodoo mark was branded deep—a scarlet voodoo mark, sharply outlined to resemble an Egyptian mummy. It did not need Camposolo's explanation—"Ka-mech, the first Pharaoh of Egypt, the black Adam!"—nor did it need the Spahi orderly's hushed exclamation that now he knew the origin of that long-drawn, lonely cry which, earlier in the morning, had cut through the silence.

"But how the devil did this—*this*—get here over the bastions? Who brought it?" Davies asked, speaking automatically without expecting a reply, hardly realizing that he had spoken; and he was startled by Camposolo's answer, high-pitched, still with that hysterical ring in it.

"Who brought him here? Who? Why, the fog—the night—Africa!"

"Of course!"

At the time the explanation seemed quite reasonable to Stacy Davies. Yes, that exotic, stinking immensity which is called Africa in lieu of a better word had done this thing; it had killed the dwarf, had branded him with the mark of the black mummy, and had then tossed him negligently across the bastions of Froide-Fontaine. Even years later, when speaking of the incident to his American friends, Davies would insist that this explanation was as reasonable as any.

They, the Americans, could not grasp it, couldn't understand Africa in the telling. How could they? They were solidly entrenched between a policeman and a department store, with the pavement, the sky, the very grass in Central Park, embodiments of civic regulations, of standards.

Standards! Yes; standards meant civilization, Davies used to add; and Africa had no standards except passion and greed, and cruelty unspeakable.

Here was the whole episode: a wailing cry in the morning and, a few hours later, the finding of the dwarf's corpse, branded with the voodoo of the black mummy.

And what then? What was there to do? Should he go out and take the fog by the throat? Should he kick the desert into loquaciousness? Should he try the third degree on the silent immensity? Should he bully Africa until it gave him the solution of the unclean riddle?

He knew himself to be in the fullest possession of his physical and mental powers, quite clever, quite determined, quite acclimated, conversant with the clicking dialects and the tribal customs of a dozen negro tribes; a man who had traveled far through the heart of the Dark Continent, who knew the land from the Kissy Cemetery at Freetown to the flaunting gardens of Sidi-bou-Said in regal Tunis; a man, moreover, who was said to be an authority on things African, who had sent in his half-dozen or so reports to the Royal Geographical Society, and various other learned bodies.

And then, like a blue-penciling clear across his fifteen years of experience and conscientious effort, came this corpse—nonchalantly tossed across the bastions!

Wasn't it sweet? Wasn't it all-fired encouraging for a white man trying to do his level, heartbreaking duty by Africa?

The next moment Davies decided that after all the happening need not worry him. He was sorry for the Ticki-Ticki—loyal little beggar; but this was the land of swift forgetting, and in another twenty-four hours the episode would have passed into the fringe of shadows: a vague impress on his remembrance, with the frightful reality of it wiped out by time. As far as he personally was concerned, the whole thing would be over by night when El-

Mokrani returned with the Master of the Hour, dead or alive!

That would be the end of this abortive conspiracy, and he had full faith in the Arab's ability. Meanwhile it was up to him to forget.

Too, the stage coach was due in another hour. On this trip Giovanni, the Sicilian driver, came from the Wild Horse Tanks, a little oasis which marked the half-way to brigade headquarters on the Algerian border, where he picked up the mail left there by his colleague of the northern route. Leaving Froide-Fontaine, he would go all the way to the border station with the home mail and possible passengers.

Davies went to his office and bent over the desk. There were friends at home to write to. It was all right now—he would soon be home, with El-Mokrani on the job.

"Dear old Jack," he began, and his pen was still busily scratching when, shortly before the booming of the noon gun, the stage coach loomed out of the creeping, coiling fog with a great jingling of bells, a creaking of harness, and a neighing of horses.

Then the cheerful shouts of Giovanni—"Mail, mail for everybody!"—and then the colonists crowding about the dust-spotted coach, forgetting putrid Africa, scenting the clean, green homeland. It seemed to be there, in that little striped mail pouch which the driver held teasingly high above their heads with a spiced, merry jest to a blushing Sicilian maiden here and there in the crowd.

It was the one day of the fortnight to which the exiles looked forward.

Ten minutes later Giovanni entered the captain's office to make his report. He was one of those countless men, men of many races and many employs, whom France uses to get at the secrets of Africa; one of that vast organization which laymen call the Secret Service, and which prefers to speak of itself as the Intelligence Branch of the Army.

His report was short and to the point. Of course there were the usual rumors, rumors slightly fantastic, some flatly contradicting each other; rumors which, in that land of babbling lips and leaky tongues it was impossible to sift. Talk of a Senegalese regiment having mutinied over there, vaguely, to the west; of an attempt at gun-running into the Ivory Coast with the connivance of a half-caste clerk in the employ of the consul of a friendly power.

Gossip, seemingly substantiated, of a missionary having been crucified in the southwest on the Upper Cross River.

"I spoke to the man who found the corpse. He told me that—"

Giovanni was about to go into revolting details when the captain cut him short with a weary gesture.

"Yes, yes," he said. He was so terribly familiar with such tales. Missionaries *would* go into unsavory places, and savages *would* have their merry little fetish superstitions. There were always periodical sacrifices for the purpose of staying some tribal calamity—people were forever being slaughtered at the new moon and other religious festivals.

"But—" Giovanni threw out his expressive hands.

"Never mind!" Davies stated with a good deal of impatience that he didn't want to hear all the blood-curdling details. They might please the other's Sicilian sense of the picturesque—but as for him—damn it all!—he was fed up with jujuism—

Davies felt nervous, overwrought. He talked on—and then suddenly, through the bubbling wave of his own words, he caught a word from the lips of the Sicilian.

He broke off in the middle of the sentence. Had he heard right? Or was it a touch of fever—had his memory played him a trick?

Had Giovanni said something—about—about—

"What did you say last?"

"A mark on the missionary's chest," came Giovanni's metallic reply. "The man who found the body made a drawing of it. He said it was strange. He had seen voodoo marks before, but never such a one. He gave me the little drawing—"

"Where is it? Give it to me—quick!" Davies demanded irritably.

Giovanni fumbled in his linen coat. He drew forth a square of paper, thumbed with much handling. Davies looked at it. The

drawing on it represented the outlines of a mummy.

Davies felt surging over him a wave of sheer, abstract terror, unconnected with any distinct realization of physical danger. Automatically, hardly knowing what he was doing and why, he rose and closed the window. He could not stand the smell which drifted from the outside, a putrid smell of corruption—victorious, triumphant corruption it seemed to him—the final African victory of matter over mind!

Again he looked at the drawing. It was the identical mark which, a few hours earlier, he had seen on the tortured body of the Ticki-Ticki — the mark of the mummy which Camposolo had seen near the Great Lakes in the ivory temple of the Master of the Hour.

And here it popped up again, like a dread, unclean mystery, on the body of a missionary, a thousand miles to the southwest.

The black mummy! The black Adam! The central fetish of swinish Africa—and it seemed to be all around him—east, north, south, west—like a wall, black, threatening, about to topple over, to crush all the white people.

And only El-Mokrani's hand to stay the catastrophe—El-Mokrani, out there in the Kwaja Hills!

Davies looked out through the window. The fog had lifted again. The empty sky and the empty desert were simmering and quivering together in a vast, heat-molten loneliness.

A drum thumped across the distance with muffled shocks and a lingering, sobbing vibration — steadily, rhythmically—and Davies confounded the beating of the drum with the dry, staccato pulsing of his own heart.

He was a brave man. He was conscious of the fact in his honest, modest way; but out there was Africa, a black land with a bright edge, like an abyss licked by a frame of fire.

And where was El-Mokrani? Had he succeeded? Would he return? Prayers, long forgotten, rose to Stacy Davies's lips.

CHAPTER VII.

CROSS CURRENTS.

Would you recite the Koran to the buffalo about to gore you?

—Afghan Proverb.

THERE were no such thoughts in the heart of El-Mokrani as, followed by his chosen four, he rode west toward the Kwaja Hills.

An hour's ride beyond Froide-Fontaine, the fog stopped, cut off as clean as with a knife. The sun rays dropped down straight from a brazen sky to shatter themselves upon the hard-baked surface into sparkling, adamantine dust—to rise again in a dazzling vapor, and El-Mokrani's nervousness disappeared in the glow of it.

He was a child of the sun, an Arab, desert bred, and he welcomed the hot peace of the sands where all the sounds and all the movements of the world seemed to have passed out of existence, where their very memory seemed to have died, and was grateful to that all-powerful, all-seeing personal God in whom he believed with such childlike faith.

A prayer came to his lips, and he chanted it free:

"Labbayk'! Allahumma Labbayk'!
La Sharika laka Labbayk'!
Inna 'l hamda wa 'i ni 'amata laka wa 'l mulk!
La Sharika laka Labbayk'!" *

His jingling retainers joined in the impromptu prayer, with Al-Shaitan the most fervent of them all.

"Labbayk!" came the chant again, and a little spotted gazel pricked up its ears to listen to the droning melody.

The prayer refreshed El-Mokrani, physically and mentally, and subconsciously, in spite of the killing quest which was taking him to the Kwaja Hills, he felt at peace with the world—quite at peace.

It was the desert which gave it, his own

* "Here I am! O Allah! Here am I!
No partner hast Thou, here am I!
Verily the praise and the grace are Thine, and the empire!
No partner hast Thou, here am I!"

desert, his Arab birthright to the stretch of yellow loam covered with billows of chalk-rock mantled by a film-like spray of sand, which surged and twirled and twisted in the fiery wind. Here and there broken ground flanked by huge, fantastic blocks piled up as if by a playful giant's hand—sudden vast clefts widening into inky caves, or choked to the brim with glistening sand. Above a sky of polished steel with a tremendous blaze of light—lonely, hot, dry—and free!

Free!—that was the breath of it, the rhythm, the meaning, the very blood—

"Ai!" he told Davies afterward, "I felt like the first man at the morning dawn of God's creation — before the five senses came to open the riddle of nature and to muddy its meaning. Or, perhaps," he added, "I felt like the last man at the evening dawn of the world, with creation itself slipping back into God's oblivion."

When, by a sudden question of one of his retainers, his thoughts jerked back to the Master of the Hour, his hatred for that black Napoleon rose and became a personal matter, a personal hatred, a personal feud.

He pictured the Master of the Hour as a dirt-stain upon the free face of the desert; a gigantic, fatuous, obese spider, complacent, unclean, terrible. He would kill him. He would kill him very slowly. El-Mokrani smiled at the thought. After all, it was he himself who was the Master here.

At noon the little cavalcade entered the thick growth of jungly forest which clad the lower slopes of the Kwaja Hills. A phenomenon it seemed, this creeping, coiling carpet of greenish-black, matted corruption edging the yellow sands, feathering further up into the gaunt hill-bush.

They dismounted and led their horses, Indian file, up the narrow jungle trail, hardly discernible, wiped by the poisonous breath of the tropics into a dim, smelly mire which bubbled and sucked—seemed to reach out for those who dared tread its foul solitude.

The cablelike, spiky creepers drooped low; they opened before the five men with a dull, gurgling sob, as fist and, once in a while, dagger-blade, jerked them aside; they closed behind them as if the forest had stepped away to let them through; leisurely, contemptuously, invincibly—"to bar our way when we return," Al-Shaitan whispered with the sudden moroseness of the negro.

A great sea of vegetation swarmed all around them, an entangled, exuberant commingling of leaves and odorous, extravagant, waxen flowers; a rolling wave of green life, but life that seemed incredible, exaggerated, innately vicious and harmful.

The Tooth of Time, a jagged bit of granite rock well named, was a good two hours' march ahead, and with the first steps into the jungle El-Mokrani's clear humor danced away like chaff in the meeting of winds.

The desert, be it in Africa or back home in Arabia, stretching golden toward his native town of Madinah—yes!—the desert was his, his by eternal rights of hereditary instinct, hereditary understanding. But the jungle was different.

He had lived in it. He had fought in it. He had used it as shield and ambush and ally during his slave-raiding years, but always had he hated and feared it.

He hated and feared it still.

The Sennussi panted and swore softly. The horses whickered and snorted. Occasionally some nameless, terribly spineless creature crawled rapidly underfoot or burst with a sickening pop as a sandal-heel crushed it.

To El-Mokrani it seemed that he was traveling through a night of primitive age —African age—age without sign or monument, without memories; age stripped of its cloak of time, and nothing remaining except the black, grinning, sinister skeleton of Africa, matted with jungle, sour with miasmic stenches, and peopled with men who were like the unrecognizable, useless tatters of a pre-Adamite breed.

He could see them here and there, through the greenish gloom of the trees, flitting past, gliding, indistinct. They blended into the jungle like brown splotches of moss on the brown, furry tree-trunks; and they gave no sign of life except a sudden, rolling flash of eyeballs—

white, staring with that aspect of concentrated attention so typical of savages.

A curse frothing from the lips of one of the Sennussi, a whanging swish from El-Mokrani's length of hippo-hide, and they would disappear again into the festering jungle. They would vanish without movement, it seemed, as if the forest had sucked them in with a deep intake of breath.

The Arab was not afraid of them. Perhaps a poisoned arrow might sob through the foliage—he would have to run that risk, and the thought did not perturb him. After all, his fate was bound about his neck. Nor was there danger of their being in league with the Master of the Hour. These jungle people had no connection nor dealings with the other Africans.

They were aborigines—with the lot of aborigines the world over; everybody's hand was against them.

Too, they knew El-Mokrani of old. If they feared the Master of the Hour as an unknown quantity, they feared El-Mokrani as a known quantity; a worse fear to a savage since he is not cursed with imagination. And often in the past had El-Mokrani sent the flame licking over their peaked grass huts; had he taken the pick of their women and their young men and sold them in the far lands.

No, there was no lurking threat of trap or ambush—and the Sennussi pushed on.

Al-Shaitan led.

A native of the Upper Niger, jungle-bred, it had been both his duty and his glory through the years during which he had fought by El-Mokrani's side, to take the lead when the fortunes of war shifted to forest or swamp.

So he walked at the head of the little column—twisting and bending, sending a spiky creeper to one side with a dry clatter of falling orchids, slashing with his dagger at low thorn bush, giving warning of treacherous pool or slimy, gliding timber-fall; occasionally appealing to the Deity with a frantic sob, but throughout keenly alert to every noise and scent and movement, stopping now and again to sniff the air or to stare into the gloomy drapery of the trees—reading the jungle like an open book.

Behind him marched El-Mokrani, followed by the two Bedouins, while the Egyptian, who led the horses, brought up the rear.

El-Mokrani felt a rush of melancholy thoughts surge through him. It was always so in the heart of the jungle, but he kept his eyes fixed on Al-Shaitan's powerful back and neck muscle, which bunched and coiled like snakes beneath the thin jubbah-shirt.

Minute after minute he watched the gigantic, swaying figure—alert, tense, putting his feet down in the oozy footprints made by the other—and alert, tense, each watching the one directly ahead of him, the rest of the Sennussi followed. They plunged into deeper forest—onward through a trail that was nothing but a few fugitive tracks in the undergrowth, occasionally crossing a clearing where the sun beat down unmercifully, and where flashing green and white things rustled out of their path.

They knew this sort of jungle warfare of old; one man to lead, the others to follow and obey without question, without hesitation, without taint of doubt or fear. They walked on, filling their lungs chock full with the fetid jungle breath, letting it out gradually to ease the strain on their breasts—silently, automatically, without unnecessary gesture or movement, without halting query or wondering glance—drilled as hard and dry and keen as a crack West Point squad.

Watch the man in front! Obey! Silently, automatically; and when, suddenly, without previous warning or indication of any sort, Al-Shaitan raised his right hand, when he turned and commenced to walk back as he had come, with just the one hissing word: "*Tarik!*"—"Back!"—El-Mokrani swung on his heel.

Back!—the others following suit like so many well-oiled machines controlled by the same lever. Back!—this time the Egyptian in front, and Al-Shaitan bringing up the rear—silently, automatically, neither more slowly nor faster than before.

No questions were asked, though everybody's heart pulsed with grim expectancy, though daggers were loosed in scabbards,

though nervous fingers brought the rifles from shoulder to hip for immediate action.

Al-Shaitan had seen, or heard something. That was enough — they obeyed; and it was only when they came to a little clearing within sight of the flaming desert which spelt security, that El-Mokrani asked the negro what had happened.

"What didst thou see?"

"I did not see, Shaykh," he replied. "I—" he grinned, "I smelled! I smelled the sour reek of the oil with which those heathen black swine rub their bodies when they prepare their sacrificial rites."

He continued morosely, unaware of the incongruity of the remark: "I, too, was once a heathen black swine. I, too, made sacrifices—Ai!—human sacrifices to powerless and accursed idols. I, too, before faith came to me—may the Prophet intercede in my behalf on the day of judgment!"

"As He will—peace on Him!" softly chimed in the Arab; and, without another word they pushed on toward the yellow desert rim. Al-Shaitan had smelled—they knew of old Al-Shaitan's marvelous faculty of scenting danger, of correlating and reading smells as they could read the tracks of animals in the desert.

A whirl of thoughts suffused El-Mokrani's brain; thoughts hot, halting, mute; crippled, incomplete thoughts; but thoughts that were quite positive.

There was the fact that Al-Shaitan had smelled the acrid odor of sacrificial oil, and that fact included the gathering of many negroes — medicine-men, assembled for the unclean, sinister purpose of their craft—negroes others than the forest aborigines.

It meant cruelties and tortures and death—to whom?

Then there was the other fact; the talk of the wooden drums he had heard back yonder in Froide-Fontaine. The drums had said that the Master of the Hour had pitched his tent below the Tooth of Time; that he was sitting alone, proud, fearless, awaiting the chiefs to come one by one—

Could it be that--

"*Allah Karim!*"

A curse rose to El-Mokrani's lips.

By the breath of God, he had walked straight to the toothy rim of a trap! Another minute, and the trap would have sprung—would have killed him!

A childish trap at that, and—he had always thought that he knew Africa.

"Ai!" he said, half to himself, "I am a vain man—a vain man indeed. I am like the fool who imagines that he can winnow a threshing floor with the wind from his nose!"

Vainly, carelessly overconfident, he had gone into the Kwaja Hills. He had forgotten that Ben-Arbi was hand-in-glove with the master; that Ben-Arbi had spies who knew of his, El-Mokrani's, ability to read the secret drum code. And by the red pig's bristles they had sent a faked message shivering through the void to get him away from Froide-Fontaine, to slit his throat at their leisure.

But—Allah be praised!—they had reckoned without Al-Shaitan's sharp nose, and he gave the grinning black a friendly slap on the back.

Then he laughed.

Had he been an American he would have said that the joke was on him, but being an Arab, he remarked that after all sense was not a courtezan that it should come to men unasked, and again he laughed.

"*Hai-hai-hai!*" The guttural laughter rose and peaked and spread, and it seemed to him that the creeping, squatting wilderness was echoing the sound; that the trees and creepers and thorn-bushes were breaking into a huge, gurgling, brassy paroxysm of merriment — at him — because he had been a fool; merriment that shook the furry palms, that made the orchid cables shed their spikes; laughter falling like a blight, shivering the tufted grass, causing the driver-ants to roll themselves into tight, pinkish-gray, unobtrusive balls, sending the tiny scorpions scurrying to cover.

"*Hai - hai - hai!*" — the wilderness screamed at the joke—"a joke hatched in hell," the Egyptian commented—"*hai-hai-hai!*"—and then, quite suddenly, El-Mokrani was silent. He stood still.

He was not the sort to probe and dissect his own emotions, to wait for psychical de-

velopments before acting physically; for, being an Oriental, he had always held that dissection of emotions and registering of impressions spoil the surety of one's aim—muddy one's clearness of action.

So, now as always, he felt, perceived, and acted at exactly the same time. His senses worked together with the instantaneous precision of a camera shutter timed to the hundredth part of a second. Suddenly he had become aware that the echo of his laughter which his imaginative Semite mind had attributed to the very spirit of the wilderness was real laughter– yes! human, physical, personal laughter.

At the same fraction of a second he saw a stabbing, crude flash of color glide among the waist-high spear-grass — and, still at the same fraction of a second, El-Mokrani's hand, answering the hurry call sent from ear and eye to brain, shot out and clutched something that wriggled and twisted.

His hand came out of the grass, and in its grip appeared a figure, astoundingly, fantastically hideous, but human; and still, on its broad, toothy mouth, was a physical indication of that merriment which had echoed the Arab's laughter.

The echo of the wilderness!—and it had been the irrepressible cachinnation of the African; screaming laughter in the face of death—laughter bubbling out throaty and high-pitched, though silence meant safety!

Grotesque, senseless, African laughter!

El-Mokrani held the captive at arm's length. He recognized him at once. It was N'kaga, the Niam-Niam medicine-man who had branded Camposolo with the voodoo mark; N'kaga, trusted lieutenant of the Master of the Hour here, in the north, far from the ivory temple where he plied his sinister craft, but arrayed in all his gorgeous fetish array as if ready to ply his craft here under the noses of the French.

El-Mokrani looked at him. Afterward, when describing the scene to Davies, he said that heretofore he had believed in the existence of the devil on circumstantial evidence only; but that one good look at N'kaga had given him all the ocular evidence he wanted.

For the man had covered his entire body with a thick layer of scarlet clay, with the voodoo of the black mummy painted across his chest in black, while his face was daubed with orange and white splotches, and his hair had been carefully trained into two foot-high spiral columns on either side of his head, resembling antelope's horns.

In his right hand he carried a stick topped with something that looked like a dried gourd; but that turned out on closer inspection to be a human head, scientifically preserved and shriveled.

From a string around his neck depended what was evidently an amulet in a tightly woven grass case, and his left arm, wrapped in a loose red blanket, was held close to his body—as if wounded, perhaps broken.

Ridiculous? Yes! Fantastically ridiculous. But too, there was something stately and ominous about him—something free and superbly savage; and to El-Mokrani he seemed like the appaling horror of a glimpsed truth—Africa's truth, recognized beyond the rent veil of his former pet convictions. For hitherto he had held that Africa was a land which could be bullied and tamed to accept the white man, be he European or Arab, as master; and now here, in his grip, was this—this thing —and this thing was a big man in his own tribe; a very big man; more important to his people than the Arab was in the Sennussi Lodge, or Davies in the Colonial government of France.

He continued looking at N'kaga, twisting his left hand through the tough fiber string from which the amulet depended. The sunlight, filtering through the feathery palm fronds in a sort of unhealthy, greenish gloom, brought out the glistening, red-smeared body in a startling way.

He looked. The next moment he decided on action—and his action was like his temperament; a hot, clear-red flame, blue-tinged with a shadow of caustic placidity.

"I shall kill thee, pig and father of piglings," he announced casually, but not at all vindictively, with a smile of sardonic amusement flitting over his high-bred, predatory features, while he tightened his grip on the amulet string. "Prepare to meet the devil, thy master, who fashioned thee

out of dirt and lust and many obscenities," and he drew his dagger with his right hand, letting the sunlight flicker for a second on the polished blade.

It amused him to be slow — this dog! this N'kaga!—and he kicked him.

He was surprised to see that the Niam-Niam was not afraid. The face, under the splotches of orange and white, showed no quiver; he seemed as inscrutable and as free as the wilderness itself, and for the tiniest breath of a second a feeling of uneasiness came over the Arab. Better finish this business, he thought: back yonder was the reek of the sacrificial oil—the Master of the Hour, and safety was miles away, beneath the brown bastions of Froide-Fontaine.

He drew back his dagger with a curved sweep. He was about to bring it down.

Then, suddenly, he heard Al-Shaitan's warning voice: "Quick — for the love of Allah!"

He jumped back, his hand still grasping the amulet string which broke with a dry snap.

The red blanket had dropped from the medicine-man's left arm. There was a hiss, an ominous click, and three feet of pinkish, dull-glistening rope stretched up and out. Another hiss and click, and Al-Shaitan's dagger came down, cutting the pink thing in two in mid air.

The thing, the two parts of it, squirmed on the ground. El-Mokrani shuddered—a coral snake, most venomous of central African reptiles, and N'kaga had held it coiled beneath his red blanket as a weapon.

And with this weapon he had made his escape. He had disappeared. The spear-grass had sucked him back. There was no trace of him, no sound, no movement. There was no sign of him except—yes!—here was the amulet, still firmly grasped in El-Mokrani's hand.

He tore away the grass covering and looked at it. It was a tiny black mummy, cut out of black agate, beautifully chiseled and carved, every last hieroglyphic of the original reproduced with minute fidelity.

A foul thing it seemed to El-Mokrani, a beastly emblem clouted out of sweat and blood and suffering—Africa in miniature.

And late that evening, when once more he and his retainers had jingled through the western gate of Froide-Fontaine, it was this black mummy of which he spoke first.

Davies picked up the amulet which the other had put on the table. He dropped it again suddenly, as if he had touched a red-hot coal.

"The black mummy—the black mummy!" he whispered over and over again.

He told the Arab of the Ticki-Ticki, murdered, tossed across the bastions—with the mark of the black mummy on his breast: he told him of the crucified missionary, found in the swamps of the Upper Cross River with the mark of the black mummy on his breast. And, in the drone of the evening drums there came to him the vision of Africa as a brooding, leering thing — immense, incredible, and in its slimy, black claws the nations of the west —the white nations—like gray corpses with leaden weights tied to their feet.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BLIGHT.

Against the darkness of the night when it overtaketh me, I turn to seek refuge in God, the Lord of Daylight. —THE KORAN.

OFTEN in after years, in a distant part of the world, Stacy Davies would remember those tense, hushed days at Froide-Fontaine: days that seemed pinched in between the yellow sheen of the desert blurred by the lavender, coiling morning mists, and the hazy outlines of the Kwaja Hills — a gray, squatting bulk, pregnant with a vague appeal: days rising and waning to the song of the wooden drums which advanced steadily, in a cumulative series of tone waves, like a solid wall of sound; thumping up with the impetus of physical shock, then suddenly receding in a way that seemed sinister—like a tragedy of uncomplete achievement—quite African.

He would remember each individual scene as it rose out of the unknown to take its appointed place in the puzzle-picture which was his life.

There was the picture of Jacqueline looking through the window of the stage-coach, and by her side, half hidden by the flopping green baize curtains, a glimpse of Nourah's golden skin and cherry-red lips.

Jacqueline was smiling good-by to Davies, to her father, to El-Mokrani — to Froide-Fontaine.

A handkerchief fluttered from her little, dainty hand; the sun was weaving a fantastic pattern through her purple dust veil, shimmering up, stabbing tiny points of clear gold in her unruly dark curls.

"Allah protect thee, heart o' me!" cried Nourah to Camposolo, who stood a little to one side of the crowd, moody, morose.

"Adieu!" came Jacqueline's low voice; then, a little louder as half a dozen *goum*—irregular black cavalry—who were escorting the stage-coach as far as the half-way oasis at Wild Horse Tanks, clattered up—"*Au revoir!*"—and, with her rosy finger-tips blowing an imaginary kiss through the hot air, "God bless you, father—God bless you, Stacy dear!"—and the coach rolled away on its northern journey—to brigade headquarters on the Algerian frontier.

"Good-by!" cried the captain, his voice, slightly choked, clashing with the mayor's parting advice to his daughter to be sure to wear flannels, to write with every mail, and to see that rascal of a Paul Cassagnac in Algiers and ask him what in the name of all the little pink rabbits had happened to that last case of cognac he had ordered.

The coach and the circling, galloping *goum* were off in a whirling haze of dust—and the mayor turned to Davies, an ironic smile curling his fleshy lips. It was a joke on this penniless American, he thought, to send his daughter on a visit to her aunt Angèle in Algiers. For ever since the captain had declared martial law at Froide-Fontaine, with himself as commander-in-chief, he had included open and shameless love-making in the military privileges cloaked in the folds of the tricolor.

Yes! — *bougre de saligaud!* — only last night, shortly after the return of El-Mokrani from the Kwaja Hills, he had caught the captain and Jacqueline strolling in the little garden which edged the mission church. He had heard a suspicious noise —a kiss, sacred name of an umbrella!— and now Jacqueline was off to Algiers. There had been a little tearful scene, but she had gone, like a dutiful daughter. Finally she had even clapped her hands in an outburst of joy at the thought of Algier's shining shop windows, at the glistening counters laden with feminine frills.

He smiled at Davies sardonically, triumphantly.

Davies grinned back with perfect good-humor.

After all, he was not displeased. He would have worried about Jacqueline as long as she was in Froide-Fontaine. Now she was safe. There was no doubt of it. With Giovanni as driver, with Nourah as her maid, and the *goum* to escort the stage-coach as far as the Wild Horse Tanks, what was there to apprehend?

The route lay straight north, and there was little fear that the unrest had spread that far. Not only that; for Giovanni boasted that nothing on four or two feet in the Sahara could overtake his little mare. Nor was there danger of ambush, with the road to the Tanks as smooth as a billiard table, with no forests, nor ravines, nor *fiuamaras* to give shelter to roaming nomads, and with the *goum* as extra precaution.

From the Tanks to the border there was even less peril—just a descent to the Bordj-i'-Taourirt, and, right across, at El-Kaör, the coach would meet with the Spahi outposts of Colonel Lemesureur.

He would be lonely without Jacqueline, of course. But he, too, knew about the Algiers' shops, and—he smiled mischievously at the thought—Jacqueline had said something about a darling little lingerie shop which she knew. She had spoken of picking out her trousseau.

Meanwhile he would stand by his guns. His guns, indeed! The squat 40-millimeters!

They would stop and splinter the attack of the Touaregs, if it came to that. He was familiar with their tactics.

They would come—in clouds, on horseback, with a great noise, a great wasting of powder—quite reckless. Then, when they drew within range, a few rounds of high-

power shell, a well-sustained musketry fire, a score or so killed and wounded—and they would gallop back into the desert.

For being half-civilized, they were cautious. They possessed nothing of value except their lives and limbs. It needed a really powerful motive to key them up to the absolute bravery of conquest — and that motive was in the south, in the driving force of the Master of the Hour, in the support of the blacks drunk with the fanaticism of the black mummy fetish.

They would repeat the same tactics day after day—and, until the supply of ammunition gave out or until the Master of the Hour had marshaled his forces, Froide-Fontaine would be safe.

In the mean time Giovanni would have reached brigade headquarters with the letter which he had entrusted to him; support would be despatched. Not enough to combat the whole seething continent, to be sure; but the news would travel north, to Algiers, thence to Paris; and even the lackadaisical, bearded, red-ribboned gentlemen of the colonial office, smug and comfortable in their wainscoted, cigar-flavored official atmosphere, would understand the brooding danger—they would act.

The house of deputies would pass appropriations in a hurry. Transports would coal and fill. Transports would sail and land. Plans would be completed; a triangular sweep through the heart of the continent, from the west coast, from Morocco, from Algiers—horse, foot, and the guns—an iron net of finest mesh which would catch the Master of the Hour.

There would be time and to spare to crush him, and Stacy Davies waved a last farewell at the bloating, whirling dust-cloud which marked the stage-coach and returned to his office. The Arab accompanied him.

Both men were silent.

El-Mokrani sat with his hands folded, the silk-covered snaky tube of his water-pipe drooping from his thin lips, in a state of evidently agreeable somnolence, looking exactly as if time had picked him up and left him there, overtaken him, passed over his head bound on more urgent affairs.

Yet, silent and stolid, he gave the impression of reckless, spendthrift power, and when finally he spoke, indicating with his hand the black mummy amulet before him on the table and his short-cropped beard wagging in the general direction of the shimmering desert, he spoke energetically, with a conclusive effort which made him move a little in his chair.

"The Touaregs have left their village at Fahs-er-Rihân," he said in a weary voice as if announcing a platitude known to all the world. "They have burned their houses; they have taken along their women and children, their cattle and horses and camels, and their stores of dour-ah-grain."

And when Davies looked up, startled though he knew not why, hearing the words without grasping their meaning, the Arab repeated what he had said.

"Gone!" he added; "flitted away like red-necked vultures to the reek of carrion up to the old castle on the northwestern road, to the Bordj-i'-Madjanah, the ancient fortified stronghold of the Fulah Emirs. There!" he pointed through the window at the desert sky where a scarlet flush was shooting up in fantastic spikes, and, as in the tail-end of the same gesture, he jerked his arm up and outward—he seemed to be repulsing a threatening shadow.

It was this gesture, a mannerism of El-Mokrani in moments of stress; it was this gesture more than the words which brought to Davies a first vague realization of the other's ominous message, and his thoughts trembled out to the Bordj-i'-Madjanah.

He was familiar with it. Generations earlier, squatting on the caravan roads like a mountain on a plain, it had given asylum to Moslem adventurers. Fulah swords and Moorish simitars and Maghrabi daggers had gone out of its brass-studded portals to rob and kill. He remembered the place well—the sharp outlines of the tremendous bastioned walls of square granite blocks sunk in concrete, over a hundred feet high, swinging in a semicircle and resting their ends upon the ragged flanks of two ranges of hills.

"But—" He looked at El-Mokrani and was silent again. Suddenly the grim meaning of the Arab's simple announcement flashed free.

The Touaregs had left their village. They were not going to attack Froide-Fontaine. On the contrary, they were willing to stand siege in their turn if the French garrison cared to sally forth. On the other hand, they were an impatient race—a race which was not bred to fight behind walls, with the masonry crumbling under the shock of high-power shells, and—

"Yes!" The Arab had guessed the other's thoughts. "N'kaga is in the Kwaja Hills—" he pointed at the black amulet—"and where N'kaga is, the Master of the Hour will not be far." He broke into mirthless laughter. "Have you ever seen a lion hunting? Have you ever seen the packs of jackals which attend the king of beasts? Ai! The master is not alone—the pack lopes after him.

"My friend," he wound up quite calmly, "the sand-storm is upon us."

"God!" the captain jumped up.

Instantly he visualized the whole thing: the Master of the Hour and his swarms of warriors—Niam-Niams, Ashantis, Fulahs, Masais, M'pongwes, and what not—advancing to the drone of the wooden drums, the screaming of ivory horns, the crackle of naked steel, the dry rasping of assegais rubbing together—the cursed, swinish, crunching wave of them, swinging up, gathering momentum out of the very heat of Africa, picking up the fighting men of every negro village—growing, growing, gathering on the way the ghostly, veiled horsemen of Bornu, the militant dervishes of Sokoto, the nobles of Timbuktu drunk with the dreams of their past prowess.

Ever growing—on east, north, west—wiping out here and there a solitary farm of Frenchmen or Maltese or Sicilian—on still, leaving blood and tortures and cruelties beyond telling in its wake!

They would be here before Giovanni could have reached headquarters! Every minute counted in such an emergency—he could have sent Giovanni north last night if he had only known! And here—El-Mokrani, in his confounded Arab contempt for time, had known this—had known it evidently for hours—and he had not told him!

Davies's thoughts were in a whirl, absurdly commingling and overlapping. Finally, out of the confused mass, a few words trembled loose:

"When—d-did you find out?"

Immediately another question popped up in his brain and was voiced: "How did you find out? Fahs-er-Rihân is miles away—the Bordj still further—how in the name of—"

The Arab smiled at the other's impatience.

"I found out last night. But I could not tell you then," he said, "for last night—ah—until ten minutes ago Mlle. Jacqueline was here; and—" he continued apologetically, with the Arab's shy discretion when speaking about women, "you—ah—you—"

Again his Arab prejudices came uppermost, he could not use the word "love," so he said: "Your heart is in her hands."

"What of that? What has that got to do with—"

El-Mokrani lifted a lean, high-veined hand.

"A man whose mind is red with the mist of love is useless. Useless as horns upon a cat, or flowers of air. Such a man—" his pleasant smile took the sting out of the remark, "is a he-goat bereft of sense. Now Mlle. Jacqueline is for the north—and now we can think facts!"

He rose, walked to the door, threw it wide, and sent a throaty call quavering in the direction of the felt tents of the Sennussi. Then he returned to the table.

"Now we can talk facts!" he continued. "We can act facts! And as to your second question, as to how I found out—*ahi!* heart of my heart, I am not in love. I acted a little without consulting you, if you will forgive me. *Ahi!* here is the answer!" as a very small Arab, a mere lad of sixteen, entered the office and bowed ceremoniously, with his hands crossed over his breast.

He was a nephew of El-Mokrani, by the name of Kassim Aziz, though his uncle, partly because of his stature, partly to emphasize the fact that the boy was vital to him—usually called him by a nickname: "Hajib"—the Eyebrow.

"Tell the effendina what thou didst last night!"

"Listen is obey!" and the Eyebrow told.

He had saddled his uncle's swiftest *sowarri* racing dromedary last yesterday afternoon; he had ridden out into the desert to scout—"to see," he put it picturesquely, "the scarf of facts which Fate may have flung across the face of doubt"—and he had discovered what El-Mokrani had told Davies.

"Good boy!" Davies smiled his approval, and the Eyebrow blushed at the terse praise.

"*Bismillah, yah Hajib!*" El-Mokrani chimed in sonorously, and dismissed his nephew, who disappeared.

Again silence fell over the two men.

Davies knew that temporarily his hands were tied. He would have to wait for Africa's move, and his bred-in-the-bone American impatience reared and plunged. He wanted to act—he wanted to do something, anything.

El-Mokrani, on the other hand, being unimaginative except in spiritual and theological matters, was not cursed with an excess of energy—"useless energy," he would have put it.

His was a curious mixture of unconcern and thoughtfulness; and so he sat there, looking as incapable of an emotional display as a stone Buddha, and to Davies's impatient questions, a sort of talkative reaction succeeding the hush of silence—what they should do, and if this couldn't be done or that—he shrugged his shoulders.

"Gods knows!" he said laconically, and then he gave a faint, flat sigh—it sounded like a butterfly flop-flopping through the air, drowsy with morning dew. When Davies, a little angry, impatient, insisted on a more constructive answer, the other announced in that slightly hypocritical manner of Mohammedans-the world over that there was no hurry—when God wished, enlightenment would assuredly come, and dropped on his knees to go through the elaborate ceremonial of the afternoon prayer.

"O Allah," he chanted. "Thou art the lamp of knowledge which is the perception of truth! The lamp is the passionless heart! Thus do thou keep it from the boisterous winds of desire and impatience!"

To his dying day Davies never found out if the Arab had considered the moment auspicious for spiritual refreshment, or if the prayer cloaked a subtle advice asking him—Davies—to be less impatient. At all events, suddenly he felt himself a thousand miles away from the Arab praying there, his face turned toward Mecca.

"Darn it all!" Again he was silent and struggled with his feelings for a while.

He had known enough Arabs in the past to understand the impossibility of making them talk when they wished to be silent—and exasperated, nervous, he flung out of the room on the veranda.

It was getting late. The inrushing evening lay thick about Froide-Fontaine with a deep, massive silence.

He drank it in. At least it was the silence of nature, not the wilful silence of man, like that of El-Mokrani in there, but a silence suddenly spotted by a faint noise.

He listened, tense.

The noise came swinging in from the village—there, beyond the feathery screen of trees and bushes which hid the mission church.

It came nearer.

He could make out a few words—still in the same voice—the mayor's voice—and most decidedly the mayor's sentiments:

"Citizens!—the republic—united—peaceful—" Here other voices, rather the shreds and fragments of them, cut in, spread, bloated, again narrowed down to the mayor's impassioned appeal: "The army—bespangled, silver-laced, overpaid ruffians—hectic, red-trousered anachronisms—the Prussianized flummery of the military—brothers all—French and Sicilians and Arabs and Touaregs—"

Then the yell of a Sicilian peasant—"*Si! Si!*"—thoroughly in agreement with the mayor—joined by other outcries, screaming like enraged cockatoos in that sort of plaintive, seething fury which is telling, but not exactly human.

Davies guessed at once what it portended. Rumors and gossip had been rife for days among the colonists; rumors and gossip and whisperings sired by livid fear—

trembling and flickering with that hidden, fuliginous threat peculiar to the mobs of southern Europe; and now with the mayor as leader and spokesman.

He looked into the office—the Arab was still at his devotions, unconscious of the tumult which drew nearer, ever nearer, finally heaving itself into physical vision as the procession came spinning around the corner of the parade-ground. All the colonists of Froide-Fontaine, including their women and children and mothers-in-law and a swarm of black laborers, thoroughly enjoying the excitement, and prancing along like bean-fed horses—and, in front, his honor the mayor.

Davies broke into refreshing American laughter when he saw him.

M. Paul Lagloire's memory had evidently winged back to the days of his young manhood when he had taken part in the Paris Commune. For he had discarded the frock coat and silk tile of "grand occasions," and had robed himself as became a demagogue—a leader of fighting civilians, ready to brush away the Bourbon cobweb of military rule with a back-sweep of his brawny fist.

His hat was of the wide-awake sort with the brim turned up in front: truly a hat of radical-liberal persuasion if ever there was one: and he had completed the political impression by ornamenting it with a waving cock-plume which gave him the look of a rakish elderly *franc-tireur,* and by winding a brilliant crimson scarf around his waist.

Even as he stalked up to the captain at the head of the mob, he continued talking:

"Citizens, do you wish peace? Then kick out these blood-gorged butchers of the military! Break loose the red flag! Send a message to the Touaregs—to the Master of the Hour, telling them that we wish to live, together with them, on a sound basis of fraternity, liberty, and equality — that we are with them — against these brass-buttoned reactionaries — ah! — faith of a patriot!"—he shook his fist at the captain, while the mob howled its approval.

All at once a wave of rage surged over Stacy Davies.

This—this—his thoughts stammered—he felt it personally, like an unparalleled, colossal outrage against him, his race, his pride, his ideals. It seemed momentarily to weaken his very faith in himself. Here he had spent fourteen years in this fetid, gangrened Africa, trying his level best to do his duty by these—these *cattle*—when he might have lived back home in America, in a land decently above sea level, decently north of the equator, in comfort, with his soul his own—and a blessed lot of clean air pouring through a regular window from a regular street!

Here was gratitude for you!

Gratitude? Hell!

He had a good mind to let them slip down to perdition any way they pleased —let 'em send their message of fraternity, liberty, and equality to the Master of the Hour! Let 'em—and then, with utter suddenness, the knowledge came to him that he couldn't.

This was Africa. White men had died for it — some of the best — they had fertilized this land with their hearts' blood. To give up now because of these people—why, it would be like cheating the dead—and he experienced a strange, crass access of confidence. Immediately he felt equal to every demand, and out of this sudden belief in himself he shot forth the one question, directly at the heads of the seething, muttering mass:

"What—do—you—want?"

What *did* they want? The naked question caught them unprepared.

By this time a few Spahis and Chasseurs d'Afrique, led by Camposolo, were running toward the crowd. The voices hushed into silence one by one. A short pause. A gathering together of all the emotional potentialities dormant in the mob—suddenly crystallizing into one lonely sentence—absurdly, incongruously thin and weak:

"We want safety!"

"*Safety?*" Davies echoed the word to himself.

Safety! And they didn't even realize that he was helpless, that there wasn't the thickness of a piece of tissue-paper between life and death with the Master of the Hour there—somewhere.

But, automatically, as if talking to children, he promised it to them:

"Sure! I'll look out. You'll be all right—don't you worry!" He heard the promise echoed at his elbow.

El-Mokrani had come from the office. He was standing by his side, picking up the words of the promise, elaborating them with Arab eloquence:

"Go back to your houses, men of Froide-Fontaine! Safety shall be yours—safety and protection. The captain has promised it, and I—by Allah and by mine own honor!—I promise it. Not a hair on your heads shall be harmed!"

It seemed like a miracle, but the mob ceased to struggle and push. They accepted the promise—there was no doubt of it—accepted it as gospel truth. They doffed their hats and gave a few cheers; they walked away from the parade-ground, carrying the struggling, protesting mayor along with them—a mob, frenzied by a word, soothed by a word!

Davies turned to El-Mokrani.

"You'd make a first-rate poker player," he began, and seeing by the look on the other's face that the great American game had not yet crossed the Red Sea into Arabia, he continued: "You—" How was he going to convey the meaning of the word *bluff* to this son of the desert? "You—er—you gave them an empty word—and they chewed it like food!"

"Empty word?" El-Mokrani looked astonished, rather hurt. "I promised. I promised by Allah and mine own honor, I shall keep my promise."

"How?"

El-Mokrani smiled. He pointed at the coppery twilight, at the sun, a flat disk of decaying brown which was dipping below the crest of the Kwaja hills.

"You remember the old years," he asked—"the years when my sword was against the West? The years when I and my Sennussi danced out of the nowhere, spotting the land with raids and death; gorging the slave-marts of Fez with black wares, and perhaps once in a while wiping out a French column, and, when I found that the enemy were too many, disappearing back into—"

"Into—where?" cut in the captain out of the bitter fulness of his past experiences with just that sort of warfare.

"Into—*safety!*" murmured the Arab gently. "Listen—"

But before he had time to explain, with the last word half spoken on his lips, silence suddenly came upon him. He stood stock still; he looked, listened.

A lonely drum beat up from the south in a dim vibration scarred by a near noise—a sharp, whistling noise—a patter of hoofs—a strange sound as of a flaccid weight flopping and rubbing against dry leather.

Darkness had dropped over the further corner of the parade-ground where the cinnamon-trees brushed low shadows over the ground—and out of the darkness came a confused babble of voices.

"Catch it!"—in French. A reply in guttural Arabic—a frightened Galla click—the glimpse of a Spahi's brilliant uniform—the sharp silhouette of a horse, rearing, plunging, with a Chasseur d'Afrique grotesquely clutching its tail.

Then a low whinnying, and a soldier ran up to the house, leading the horse by the bridle. It was covered with dust—trembling—foaming at mouth and nostrils—and—

There was something tied to the saddle; something terribly lax and limber—something that moved about like a clown in an Italian pantomime.

Stacy Davies stared.

"My God! It's Giovanni!" He jumped from the veranda, closely followed by El-Mokrani.

Giovanni was dead.

An assegai had been driven through his neck. Splotches of stiffening, dust-powdered blood covered his clothes, his face, and the fiber rope which tied him to the saddle-horn.

His shirt was open. On the naked breast a livid, cruel mark stood out—the outlines of a mummy.

And the captain gave a great, throttled cry: "Jacqueline—my God! Jacqueline!"

His knees seemed suddenly to turn to jelly. The low-dipping sun swung to and fro in a blazing, brownish-yellow pendulum.

A flood of red with broad, interlacing veins floated before his eyes.

He felt a dull jar as he fell on his hands and knees and rolled over.

CHAPTER IX.

DEPTHS.

. . . wherefore strive or run.
On dusty highways ever, a vain race?
The long night cometh, starless, void of sun.
What light shall serve thee like her golden face?
— ERNEST DOWSON.

WHEN Stacy Davies came to he found himself on the couch in his bedroom.

There was something moist and cool on his forehead. Above him he could hear the sucking swish of a fan. He lay still for a moment. Then he opened his eyes.

Through the semidarkness he could distinguish a tall, white-robed figure near the door. And as he looked he recognized the closely cropped beard and hawk-nosed profile of El-Mokrani.

Then the scene on the parade-ground rose before him, and blending with it, curiously, meaningly, rose the other scene—at the time of the last *souk* when Ben-Arbi, the father of Nourah, had insulted Jacqueline and had been thrashed by El-Mokrani.

The two memories commingled—united.

It was all clear to him; terribly, desperately clear. Ben-Arbi, confidant of the Master of the Hour, secure in the Master's help and support, had attacked the stage-coach - the *goum* had doubtless turned traitors. It was evident that he had no intention of hiding his crime. For the horse, with its ghastly burden, had been driven back to Froide-Fontaine as a little reminder, a little jest, after the manner of the Touaregs.

Ben-Arbi must be sure that he was holding the winning hand. Of course. It was borne out by what El-Mokrani had told him—the burning of the village, the occupation of the Bordj-i'-Madjanah—the—

And Jacqueline!

Was she alive—or dead—or—

It seemed to Davies as if he sank into a cushion of air. His senses reeled. There was a problem which it was up to him to solve. He saw it fade from a black, threatening figure into a gray cloud, and then into a ragged, dirty-white mist. But it did not disappear. Somehow it dealt with his love, with his despair, and, too, with his duty toward Froide-Fontaine, toward France.

For a moment, subconsciously, he tried to force the conviction on himself that the reality could not be half as bad, as appalling, as dreadfully anguishing, as the fantastic terrors of his imagination. Later on he used to say that during that minute his heart was pierced with all the accumulated sufferings of humanity since first God and the devil fought over the soul of Cain.

Jacqueline—at the mercy of Ben-Arbi! And the very next second, with an extraordinary swing of his brain—"a swing to starboard," he put it with one of his absurd similes—he knew that, whatever had happened to Jacqueline, whatever might happen to her, he must forget her—then.

"Yes—forget her," he said out loud with a queer contraction of his lips; and he shivered, his throat worked, his Adam's apple rose as if he were about to swallow some nauseating medicine.

His first impulse had been to rush to the rescue of the girl whom he loved; to marshal all Froide-Fontaine—to strike at Ben-Arbi, regardless of everything else.

Then rose the problem, and solved it mercilessly, like a soldier, sentencing himself to black grief, sentencing Jacqueline to—what?

He knew only that he had not the right to risk the lives of his troopers to save *one* life. For there was his responsibility—his job. There was his duty toward the colonists — his duty — God! — here it floated through the mists of his love like a naked, lonely hulk on a gray sea.

But, whatever Jacqueline's fate, his duty came first.

He couldn't help her. No, he couldn't help her! He repeated the words over and over again. He couldn't help her, and no mistake.

But the others, the colonists, they could

still be saved; for there was the Arab's promise about safety.

"El-Mokrani!" he called to the Arab, who walked over to the couch and looked at the American without speaking.

He could not speak. Sympathy? To be sure, he felt sympathy with the American. But he was too Oriental to attempt the impossible which a European would have tried; to grapple with another man's sentiments; to pronounce words of condolence or pity. It would have seemed indelicate to him. He knew that grief and sorrow and pain were harsh things, lonely, cut-off things — indivisible units of Fate which every man must bear alone, which no man can share; and when finally words came to him, they were of the other matter—the safety of the colonists according to his promise.

"But before I tell that which is in my mind," he said, "you must swear an oath, heart of my heart—an oath of secrecy."

And Davies swore.

The Arab spoke rapidly and decisively; indifferent to the distant drums which droned with a drowsy, poignant plaint—expanding, creeping nearer, with a rushing, brutal, headlong undertone, like the chant and tramp of a gigantic multitude in motion.

He spoke for a long time, occasionally stopping to answer Davies's wondering questions and to drive home a point when Davies frankly doubted; and when he had finished, night had dropped down with a velvety cloak splashed with frosted silver, and Davies's thoughts were in a whirl—a whirl blending curiously the regal purple and gold of the Arabian Nights with the tawny orange of ancient Egypt, and the drab and gray of ultramodern efficiency.

He lived to see the reality of this fantastic whirl.

But, straight to his dying day, when speaking of the subsequent events, he would say that, somehow, even after he had seen and felt it, had helped it and lived through it — yes, though he realized the blatant inanity of the remark, he would insist that the thing *couldn't* have happened, and he would add that he felt "very much like the Yankee farmer who saw a camel for the first time in his life, stared at it long and earnestly, then turned away with the terse criticism: 'Gosh a'mighty! There *ain't* no sich animal!'"

For El-Mokrani's tale was amazing. It painted the empty night with crowded processions of lost ages. It dealt with the stupendous ghosts of Africa's dead set square against a background of the infinitely deathless.

It gave to Davies the solution of many things about which he had wondered formerly: not only the solution of the angry riddle of El-Mokrani's sudden appearances and disappearances in the days of his conflicts with the French, but also the answer to at least one of the great mysteries of the Sennussi Lodge: he understood how the Sennussi, persecuted not only by foreigners but even by their own coreligionists because of the heterodoxy of their teachings, managed to survive, to grow and grip and hold.

Reaching back, El-Mokrani's tale gave him the key to many an unsolved enigma of ancient history—clear back to the clanking days of the Visigoths' tremendous Mediterranean adventures; to the days when African Carthage rose from the sea and challenged the might of the West at the marble gates of Rome; to the misty past when painted Egypt was the hub of the world amidst the pylons of her temples.

Then, swinging ruthlessly into modern days, as far as China, as far as Boston, he saw the seal to it all put on by the patient hands of a Manchu Moslem who had received his technical education at a New England college.

And the tale was complete—swinging through the centuries with neither crack nor fissure.

"I give up the secret of my lodge," said the Arab, "because I love you; because you gave a promise; because your promise is mine. I give into your hands that for which the men of your race have hunted through the many years. I give it to you without fear or hesitation—because I trust you. If ever my sword should again be drawn against yours—then—" He hesitated; and the American continued the sentence for him.

"I shall forget the secret once it is told, El-Mokrani," he said again. "I swear it!" he added simply, solemnly, and took the other's hand.

El-Mokrani smiled.

"The others—the colonists, the soldiers—they do not matter. Their hearts are bent on safety. They will be blind with the light of it when they see it below their feet. And you—you will forget! That is good!" and he continued the tale.

"The founder of the Sennussi Lodge, the great Sheik Si Mohammed ben-Sennussi el-Madjahiri, knew about it," he said. "A learned man he, to whom Africa was an open book. And when the Sheik-ul-Islam of Cairo, the Sheik el-Hanniech, denounced the great master as a charlatan, an unbeliever, and a heretic: when he anathemized him publicly in the Muayad Mosque; when the *ulemas* and the high ecclesiastics of Cairo threatened to stone him, the great master left. He traveled west. He crossed the Sudan and half the Sahara, and he took refuge there!"

El-Mokrani pointed into the black night, which was drowning in a shimmering wave of stars and shot through with a green zodiacal light.

"He drank safely from the desert, from the sandy, cracked lips of Africa. And there, for years, before the Moslem world understood that he was a saint and not a sinner, he taught and preached. There he married Menna, his wife of the Ouled-Tuaba tribe. Thence he sent missionaries through the length and breadth of Africa. There he took refuge once more when he was hard pressed.

"And I, being a Sennussi, versed in the secrets of the lodge, when mine enemies pressed me, I, too, took refuge there!"

The "there" was an underground city, over three square miles in extent, through which ran one of those subterranean rivers which bathe the feet of the thirsty date-trees in the hottest, driest parts of the desert. There were buildings down below, El-Mokrani said, some ancient, some modern; store-houses filled with grain and dried meat and dried milk-balls. A thousand men could live there for a year or longer without fear of discovery.

"There," within a short distance of Froide-Fontaine, not far, on the other hand, from the Kwaja hills, was an underground city, the roof of which was a gigantic mass of ruins.

Davies knew them—an amazing labyrinth of broken pillars, shivered screens of fretted marble half buried in the sand; tumbled, iron-studded gates whose hinges were eaten out with rust; cracked plinths—a mad jumble where the arts of Egypt and Rome, of Carthage and the Moors, had rioted together and died together; where, during daytime, countless blue pigeons with yellow top-knots cooed and whirred, and which gave night shelter to the prowling jackals and the tiny, downy owls which the Arabs call "the mothers of squeaking."

"The entrance to the underground city is among the ruins," the Arab went on and told how, many centuries ago, a Pharaoh of Egypt, driven out by his stepbrother, had given solemn oath by the Extended Wings and the Golden Disk of Ra that, since the level of the earth was barred him by his brother's treachery, he would descend into the bowels of the earth and live there at peace. So he had struck away from the Nile, across the Sudan, half-way across the Sahara, with his slaves—Jews and Nubians belike—and had built this underground city.

"A great man was the Pharaoh," said El-Mokrani, "and down there is the city—a gigantic ghost of this great man's ambitions—the center, the focus, the climax of his great dead heart.

"Other men, persecuted by Fate, have found refuge there through the centuries. The Carthaginians used it as a secret storehouse when they fought the Romans. The Kabyles found asylum there when the blue-eyed barbarians pressed them overwhelmingly; so did the Algerian patriots who battled under the green flag of Abd-el-Kader. I—I have used it, and now the dead city of the dead Pharaoh will give safety to the colonists of Froide-Fontaine!"

Davies was carried away by the picturesque immensity of the thing; swept backward into the dawn of history—into the tawny heart of Egypt when Thoth ruled sublimely, when Anubis and Horus were

mighty-limbed gods, when big-eyed children laughed and danced on the Theban Hills—when Europe was an indefinite cloud on the outer rim of civilization, when America was not even dreamed of.

And then, perhaps with the thought of modern, steel-built America, doubt came to him, a practical doubt which clashed incongruously with this tale of the musty centuries.

"What about—" He paused; the very word struck him as both foolish and insulting, topping, as it did, the other's fantastic tale; but he forced it out. "What about—ventilation? How the deuce can people breathe down there?"

The Arab laughed. He explained that formerly an immense, funnel-shaped air channel had connected the underground city with a lonely clearing in the Kwaja hills; but that years before the Sennussi, fearing that some inquisitive explorer, or perhaps some nosing jungle-black might discover it, had had the air channel blocked up with granite boulders and sand and rubbish.

A young Sennussi, a Chinese Moslem from Manchuria, had been sent to Boston to study engineering.

"He came here," continued El-Mokrani, "and he worked for years, quietly, patiently, burrowing like a rat—a Chinaman indeed, heart of my heart!—and now everything is perfect. The broken columns of the ruins are hollow, hollow!"

Davies, in spite of the sorrow in his heart, smiled at the gorgeous inconsistency of the picture; the unknown, patient, Boston-trained Chinese engineer digging through ruined columns so as to supply a dead Pharaoh's city with proper American ventilation.

Early next morning, with scouting parties of Spahis scouring the desert, the two men visited the ruins, and El-Mokrani led Davies straight to the entrance of the cave city: an enormous slab of granite carved with hieroglyphics which looked as if time had tossed it there with a careless gesture, but in reality a sort of trap-door which opened smoothly through an ingenious system of levers—another innovation of the Chinese engineer — and whence steps led into the sunken town.

Naked feet had worn the steps to glassy knobs and uneven lumps. Stunted plants had sprung up between the split stone slabs, and Davies and El-Mokrani had to let themselves down carefully, hand over hand, holding on to the tufts of tough grass and the gnarled limbs of the dwarf shrubs.

Once there was a faint hissing as a snake slipped away, and the *chk-tick-chk* of a scorpion hurrying for cover.

But arrived at the lower level everything was as the Arab had described it: an ideal place of refuge, with running water and stores a plenty; and whatever else was needed, matches, petroleum, additional food, and household goods, the post commissary and the houses of the colonists could supply.

The whole thing was one of those man-made marvels — enormously Egyptian, which vie with the miracles of nature: an incredible achievement of skill and patience which, Davies used to say, hinted at something which it could not utter, something grandiose as well as pathetic—this spot of life, of safety, amid the cataract of the golden sands.

Curiously it seemed to him that his and the Arab's positions were reversed.

For the latter—excitable, impressionable by all the rules of the racial game of "Tag! You're It!"—was making sober, constructive side remarks about "colonists will have to be careful—no cooking nor fires during the day, only at night. Some of the hollow columns are used as chimneys. Smoke could be seen during daytime"—while he, prosy, efficient American, felt the burden of an immense psychic impression.

He stared into the gloomy cave town with its mysterious, coiling shadows, black on black, like watered silk, with sudden splashes of darkish-green where scraggly thorn-bush or gnarled scrub-oak pitted its strength against the crunching, sunless heart of the earth—and through it the sucking lap-lap-lap of the underground river.

An oppressive, silent place, peopled with the ghosts of Pharaoh and Carthaginians and Sennussi—but safer than live, level-

ground Africa, the Africa where there was a threat of death in the morning breeze and a taint of torture in the great, yellow, unwinking eye of the sun.

The colonists, once the situation was explained to them, obeyed without a murmur. They took it rather in the nature of a lark, and felt doubly reassured when they were told that the soldiers, French as well as Sennussi, would share their subterranean exile.

It had taken Davies and El-Mokrani only a moment's deliberation to decide that it would be useless to attempt active warfare with the few hundred troopers: they would be but a handful of meat thrown into the maw of the Master of the Hour, said the Arab; and what was the use of feeding that maw?

"And you and I, what will we—" Davies was silent. There was Jacqueline. The thought hurt terribly.

He had done his sworn duty by the colonists; what was he to do now for himself, for the girl he loved?

If he could only reach her—if he could only die by her side! He had come across that last phrase often in romantic novels—had always smiled at the idea, had always held that people do not want to die, however great their despair.

Death? He would welcome it. Good Lord, he wasn't afraid of it! He had wrestled with death before, in African jungles and forests; had found it a most unexciting contest, just a nasty, blotchy mess, without glory, without a last scaring of faith in victory, without even a flash and thought of ultimate wisdom.

Then he became aware that the Arab was speaking. He caught the words:

". . . two small specks, you and I, heart of my heart. The elephant does not feel the flea which clings to the hair of its tail; the Master of the Hour will not feel us—you and me, nor will Ben-Arbi. We be brave men—you and I." He drew himself up with an air of steely assurance, superb self-satisfaction hooded under his sharply curved eyelids, and his voice was as keen and dry as a new-ground sword.

"The Bordj-i'-Madjanah is not far—there are ways of—"

He did not have to finish the sentence. Davies understood.

"God, man! You—you mean you'll—help me— Jacqueline, you and I—" He choked; a strange veil blurred his vision. A third voice chimed in.

"And I!" Camposolo had stepped up.

In after years Davies was wont to say that doubtless they looked like a trio out of some romantic operetta — the Arab, the American, and the ragged, nameless man who had gone Fantee—"holding hands we were," he would say: "looking into each other's eyes with utter solemnity, like little boys getting through the rites of their first high-school frat. Quite pompous, impressive and—hang it!—decent! Seemed that each of us had taken a good peep over the edge of the other two fellows' hearts, and had found—well, had not found it wanting. Isn't that the way the Bible puts it?"

So it was decided. The three were to attempt — something; they were afraid of even using the word "rescue"—it seemed too impossible.

With the coming of the evening star—Jupiter, which all Africa knows and fears as the "Eye of the World"—Davies caused all the colonists of Froide-Fontaine, black and white and mixed, men and women and even the children, to be gathered together in the market-place; and there El-Mokrani addressed them from a bastion of the fort, his low powerful voice blending weirdly with the constant mutter and rumble of the drums that were never still.

He told them, sometimes in Arabic, sometimes in French, and sometimes in the Lingua Franca of the traders, of the looming menace of the Master of the Hour and of their own puny helplessness before the storm that would certainly break upon them. He set forth their utter danger in words and tones that promised safety even while they brought terror to the hearts of the hearers.

And then he spoke of their gateway to safety, their only refuge.

"Ye shall be saved," he promised deeply. "Not one of you shall perish, for it shall come to pass as in the days before the coming of the Prophet—on whom be peace!—when the great Afrits would whisk a whole

people into the halls of invisibility as one should swallow a sweetmeat. Yet ere ye may be saved ye must every one of you swear a great oath—by Allah and by Allah and by Allah—that your eyes shall be blind and your ears deaf and your mouths dumb for ever as to that which ye shall find, the great mystery. Ye must swear once more, even by the Eye of the World"—he flung an arm aloft at the brilliant planet blazing low in the sky—"ay, swear by Al-Kasar itself—or perish!"

And in a frightened swish and hum, like the restless waves clutching at a sea-coast, came the response—"We swear."

Nor would any man or woman there, white or black, ever break that oath. For such is the nature of the spell of the Dark Continent.

Thereafter straight through the night Davies and El-Mokrani supervised the work of troopers and colonists. They sent scouting parties out to guard against spies and surprise attacks. They directed the work of the sappers who were digging, digging like so many ants—laying mines to blow up Froide-Fontaine as soon as the evacuation was complete.

Stacy Davies suggested saving the whole town as a trap for the Master's men, but the Arab shook his head. Some one would have to stay behind to touch off the mines, and that sort of heroism is not African.

Davies wondered what the Master of the Hour would think when he learned, as he was sure to learn, that Froide-Fontaine was a smoking ruin without a trace of life. But the Arab said it did not matter. By morning the eternal, shifting, heaving desert would have wiped out every last trail of the people leading from the fort to the underground city. Perhaps the Master would think that the colonists had somehow broken through—had reached the border in safety.

Nor would the Master worry—he was hunting bigger game. A few hundred lives more or less did not count.

They worked on. Finally everything was finished. The mines were ready to be set off. All necessary stores had been transferred, and the people began their descent down the slippery steps into the gloomy asylum.

Davies never forgot the sight. The night had piled itself up like a mountain of black, sodden wool. There were a few smoky torches, a clouded, fitful light. Staring down into the cave he could hardly see the people: just a shadowy movement or two, a hint of elbows sticking out, a foot slipping, sliding sideways, looking incongruously, ridiculously immense in a sudden shower of sparks from the torches.

They went silently enough, without much babbling; just a flat hum of voices—a faint cry quivering in a sort of querulous haze as a heavy wooden shoe stepped on tender fingers, the occasional light tinkling of a Sicilian woman's massive gold earrings, a discordant scraping of metal scabbards, a child's high-keyed sob of fear.

Then the Arab stooped. He gave a jerk and heave. The carved granite slab slid into place with a dull thud of finality. The three men—Davies, El-Mokrani, and Camposolo—stood there alone with the night, with Africa, all three dressed like Touaregs in black, woolen burnoose and black haik.

They turned and looked at Froide-Fontaine, bulking ghostly through the night. The mines were timed to the minute and the explosion came suddenly.

A short, staccato grumbling, then a noise like a colossal cough. The whole post quivered like an animal gone mad with fright, and the bastions, the church, the houses, exploded all around with an overpowering concussion.

At the same moment a violent, tearing splotch of light fell on the blind face of the night. It was not that the light had jumped forward, but the darkness seemed to leap back with an immense crash.

Came a gigantic flame—a single flame. It rose straight, with noises like the whir of wings—a dull detonation, followed by a vicious crackle and splutter as of machine-gun fire—and from the cone of the flame a wave of sparks stabbed up. They rolled themselves into a golden ball, rapidly tearing into wavering, fantastic spikes which floated above the flame, sank into it, mated with it smashed it into a flat, dullish-purple disk.

The disk itself fell. It crashed into the crumbling houses. It shivered into a thousand flickering tongues—orange and crimson and dead-white. Then an avalanche of flames, and the post burned mournfully, imposingly—"like a funeral pyre of dead hopes"—the thought came to Davies as, by the side of the two others, he turned his back on what was left of Froide-Fontaine and stepped out—into the silent and cheerless night.

And then, incongruously, the thought came to him of home, of America—his friends back yonder.

He heard from them once in a while—rather envious letters, because his fate had cast him into the far countries.

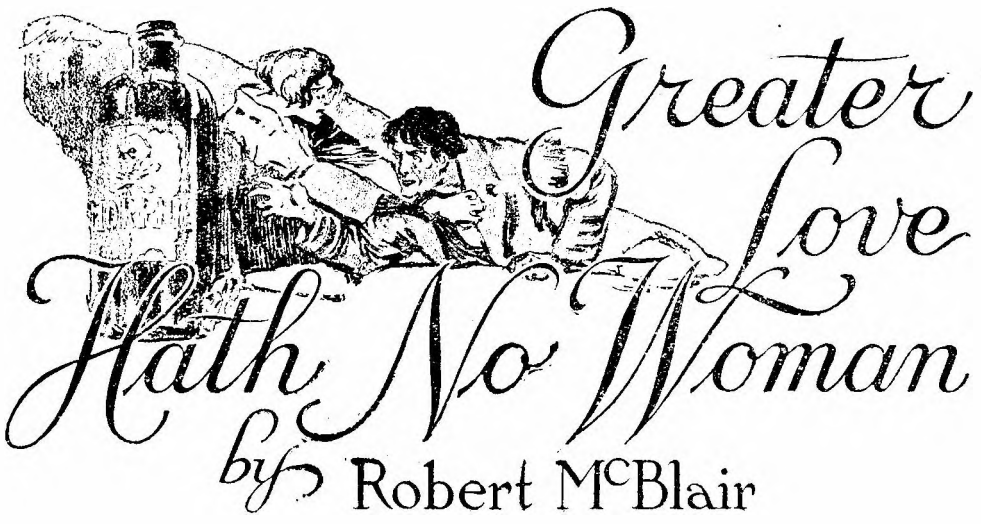
They knew Africa only as a sort of lucent, magnificent, color-shouting vagueness, a glorious indefiniteness—with heat and insects and fevers of course, but filled to the brim with a lot of bully adventures.

They did not know the wrath of Africa—the wrath of this stinking land which was often exhausted, thus dormant, but never appeased.

Never appeased—good Lord! Then he felt El-Mokrani's hand on his shoulder, he heard El-Mokrani's voice:

"Peace, heart of my heart, peace!"

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.



Greater Love Hath No Woman

by Robert McBlair

THE telephone bell rang, startling us. Father Gallivan—without his coat, and in a shirt of black silk—was nearest.

"Yes," he answered. "One minute." He handed the instrument to Dr. Rivers.

Leaning back in the big leather chair, his feet on the desk, the doctor listened intently. "You'll have to talk slower," he said. "Who?" He let his feet drop to the floor and sat up with a jump. "Good Lord! Yes; I'll pick you up in five minutes. Good-by."

He put down the telephone and looked around, his ruddy face wearing a strained expression.

"Mother Casselvoy," he explained. "She's been shot. I don't know how badly. Phone for the sleigh, will you Father, while I get ready?"

It was ten below zero outside. While Father Gallivan telephoned, I ran to fill two hot water bottles, and by the time they were prepared the sleigh was at the door.

We packed him in. "Come back soon," we begged; "or send us a message. We'll wait up."

He unwound the reins from the whip as we hurried, shivering, back into the house; and soon the jingle of his sleigh bells was lost in the clear, hard-white stillness of the mountain night.

Father Gallivan and I drew nearer to the fire. We were silent, and I have no doubt that his thoughts, as mine, were on "Mother" Casselvoy.

I don't know how long we sat silent by the log fire, but after a while the door opened and hastily closed, letting in a wedge of chilled air, and Jud Bryant shuffled over to the blaze, beating his gloved hands together.

"Has the doc got back yet?" he asked.

"No. We're waiting up for him."

He leaned against the large mahogany desk in the center of the room, so engulfed in a mammoth red and black mackinaw that his original frame could only be guessed at. He was typical of the habitant stock of southern Canada and northern New York, with tanned skin, high equiline nose, pale blue uncertain eyes, and long brown mournful mustaches, which just now supported little fast-melting icicles. Loquacity was Jud's besetting curse, and that he gazed now into the fire in silence we knew signified some emotional disturbance.

"I knew he would get her in time," he remarked after a moment.

"Knew who would get her?" we inquired.

"Why, ain't you heard?" he asked in surprise.

"That Mother was shot; nothing else."

"Why, Joe, I mean. Her husband. Didn't you know he shot her?"

"Intentionally?" we cried.

"I don't know; and I don't know how bad. 'Twas with a rifle, though. And he's bound to be the death of her. Been dogging her with trouble ever since—ever since before they were married, when she was the prettiest girl in seven counties. I ain't ashamed to say she turned *me* down!"

He shifted to the other foot and glanced around in embarrassed alarm after this impulsive admission. But nobody laughed.

"We was mostly drunk the first time," he went on, not needing encouragement. "All of us—about ten—was in Mannix's saloon down here by the railroad (only there wasn't no railroad then), singing and laughing and hollering—pretty well lit up. Casselvoy was there, too, of course. He was a likely fellow; good looking, and don't-give-a-damn, and called himself a devil with the ladies.

"One of the fellows got hold of some clothes that a priest had left in a box in the hotel, and he came into the barroom with them on, trying to walk steady, and making like he was saying a sermon.

"Well, all the fellows began to laugh, and some of 'em began to holler: 'Let's have a wedding! Let's have a wedding!'

"Some of 'em wanted to go up-stairs and wake up the girl what done the cooking, but the barkeep wouldn't stand for that—said he'd lose his job.

"Then Casselvoy jumps up from where he'd been sitting on a beer keg, and pushes everybody back until he was listened to.

"'I'll get the girl!' he hollers. 'You just follow me. I'll furnish the girl!'

"He was a fiery, slender fellow, with high color and bright black eyes, and everybody followed him, though he couldn't hardly walk. We ought to have known better, but you know how a crowd of drunks is; and we piled out into the road and went along singing: 'Here Comes the Bride!' till you could 'a' heard us over in Placid. Casselvoy was ahead with the fellow in priest's clothes. We could see 'em in the bright moonlight, arm in arm, trying to help each other to walk straight.

"Well, presently we comes up near to where Annette Fournier lives (that was Mother Casselvoy's name, you know) and Casselvoy he comes back to us and says, 'Sh! and we all climbs over into a field and under an open hay shed at the far end of it, where we laid down, laughing and giggling, the priest fellow with us.

"Well, it was some few minutes—part of the fellows had gone to sleep—before we heard people swishing through the dry grass, and I looks up and sees Casselvoy and a girl coming through the moonlight on the meadow. He had an arm round her shoulders and was talking to her low and sweet—sometimes stumbling, but the air and the walk had sobered him some.

"Well, I didn't recognize her then. I hadn't suspected nothing like that, you know. But presently they was closer; I saw she had a bundle, like clothing and

things, under her arm; and in another minute I knew it was Annette.

"No woman ain't never looked at me the way Annette Fournier was looking at the scamp, Casselvoy. I expect I won't never forget it. Her face was like delicate marble in the moonlight, and her eyes had a sort of light in them, like stars. She was like an angel—worshiping. And he stood there over her and swayed a little, and we could hear him.

"'We'll go away,' he says, 'from all the cruel world,' he says, 'that don't understand us.' (You know when he got started on that poetry stuff, he believed it himself.) 'And we'll have a home,' he says, 'that's ours all alone. And we'll be happy.'

"She had her lips parted and she was looking off as if she was seeing dreams. He swayed a little, and she put her arm round him—she didn't know nothing about drinking, you know.

"And then he calls out: 'Father Harrigan!' he calls; 'Father Harrigan! We wants to get married.'

"And the fellow with the priest's clothes on gets up with hay all hanging to him and staggers over to them.

"All this happens, you know, before we rightly knows what's a going on.

"Well, the licker had pretty well got the priest fellow, and when he reaches them he puts out his hand to hold himself up on Casselvoy, and missed him and would have fell flat, but Casselvoy caught him in his arms and the fellow just hung there limp.

"His hat fell off, and Annette—who had looked scared when the fellow began to stagger—saw that he wasn't a priest at all, but only old Jesse Halter who fed the pigs and swept up around for his food and drinks at Mannix's road-house.

"Well, I crept down in the hay, because I didn't want to see her face when she seen what Casselvoy had planned. But two or three of the drunken fools laughed out loud, and I looked up and saw her glance over and see them sitting up in the hay there laughing.

"Well, even in the moonlight I could see her turn red with shame and mortification—that we should 'a' seen her heart bare, you might say, and how he had treated her. She shrank away, and seemed to be even littler there in the big field, and covered her face with her hands. But first she said: 'Joe!' Just that one word. And I never knew before how everything to be said—all to do with past promises and dreams, and broken hopes—could be put into one word by the tone of a girl's voice.

"She looked up presently and saw that Joe had let the priest fellow drop and was hardly able to stand straight himself. For the first time she must have realized that he, too, had been drinking too much.

"She didn't even look over to the fellows sitting in the hay. I think she had forgotten they were there. She just went over to him, like a mother to a child.

"'Joe, dear,' she says. 'Come, go home,' she says. It was like she felt he was sick with a fever instead of drunk. 'You poor, dear, silly boy,' she says. 'Come, I will take care of you.'

"Well, Joe he begins to cry, just maudlin whisky tears; and she picks up her bundle and leads him away. Her little head was against his arm, her arm was around his waist, and we sat there in the hay and watched them cross the field and go through the gate and pass up the road out of sight.

II.

"It wasn't long, of course," went on Jud, "'fore the story was all over the county. And presently Annette's father got hold of it and was set on making trouble.

"But Annette was the boss as far as her father was concerned. She made him promise that if Casselvoy give up drinking he would let the matter drop. Then she went after Joe and made him promise to quit. I s'pose he must have loved her—as much as he could—and sure enough he cut out the booze. Didn't nobody think he'd stick to it, but he kept it up for quite a spell; for so long—and him working steady too—that old man Fournier even consented to let him marry Annette, and advanced him the money to buy a farm with.

"They bought some bottom land down

by the river—where Mother Casselvoy lives now, you know—and Joe he kept straight for more than a year.

"A fellow like Joe, though; you bolster him up on one side and he slops over on the other. He stayed off drink because Annette she kept him busy on the farm and watched him like a hen with a single chicken—she always went with him when he drove to town. But some months after their first child was born that fellow come along through this country who was selling dope.

"He was a pretty slick article, you know. Made pretend like he was wanting to buy some land, and stayed around at places free until the folks got onto him. And he would give the stuff away at first—on the sly, like he was doing a favor—till he got it started with a number of young fellows. Most of 'em since have died. He was a dope fiend himself you know. I guess that's how he had come so low as to peddle the stuff; don't look like a natural man could bring himself to do it. And it came out later that he was traveling about the country all the time for a bunch of peddlers in New York, working up business for them.

"Well, Joe Casselvoy fell for it. You might 'a' known! And before their second baby was born he was plumb a slave to it, and it had got him so that he left his wife—her in the condition that she was—and his year-old child, and had gone off to a joint over by Lake Clear, where him and some others of a tough bunch hung out in the back room of a saloon and road-house.

"I didn't know where he was at the time, but somebody brought down word presently that Annette was on the farm all alone with a new little baby—her father had died, you know, and she didn't have no folks—so I goes along by there to see if I couldn't help.

"Hearing as I was going, the barkeep at Mannix's give me a note saying Casselvoy had sent it over by a bum, and he asked me to take it to her.

"Well, I got there and found that she was in bed, a blue-eyed mite of a ten-day baby by her; and I don't know as I ever saw her look prettier, with her red gold hair all around her sweet face, and that wonderful surprised sort of look that you see on the face of a mother.

"It took me up sharp, and I fell to cussing Casselvoy inside of me for taking her away from me and then treating her like this.

"I started not to give her the note; I knew it was just to ask for money, and meant more trouble; but when she smiled at me and held out her hand so friendly and honest I just couldn't deceive her, and I took it out and gave it to her.

"'Oh!' she cried. 'It's from Joe!' And I knew she was happy.

"'Oh!' she cries again when she had read it; and tears came into her eyes. 'He's sick. My poor boy is sick!' And the tears began running down her cheeks.

"Well, I knew he was over there doping—and I guess she knew it too; but it made me sore, and I says:

"'Annette, why do you bother about him any more? He'll never be any good as long as he lives. And he don't love you; he couldn't, or he wouldn't treat you this way.'

"She sat up in bed, and I ain't never seen nobody look so surprised.

"'Why, Jud Bryant!' she cries. 'And for you to say that to me! Don't love me! Why, I'm all he's got in the world!'

"Then she seen I was sorry I'd said it, and she laughed kindly. 'You're a man, Jud,' she says, 'and I guess you can't understand. But, don't you see? I'm all he's got. It's like he's—like he's in a marsh, and sometimes he almost sinks; and it is like I was a bit of high ground. He can come back to me; and so long as he don't get too far from me he knows he ain't quite lost.

"'Why, Jud,' she says, 'just think what would happen to Joey if he didn't have me. Nobody would love him, and he'd just go on down and presently he'd die—and nobody would care!'

"She laid back; she was tired from all that talking; and she said, like she was proud: 'I am the only person in all the world that he does love.'

"She closes her eyes, and I tips out and walks over and sees that the woman on the

other farm will come in twice a day to look after her; and then I goes on home.

" Well, you wouldn't believe it, but that afternoon she goes over to the next farm and leaves her year-old baby, and then starts out and walks all the way to Lake Clear—eight miles.

" She gets there about dark, toting the little baby, and pushes open the door of the saloon that's under the Van Dorien road house, and walks in.

" It wasn't nothing but a joint, as I said. A dirty oil lamp, in a bracket over one end of the bar, only half lighted the small square room. The barkeep, a little, purple-nosed Irishman, was leaning on the counter, reading a pink sporting sheet. The place reeked of stale beer and stale tobacco and kerosene. Two frowzy women and a man was sitting at one of the three small tables, smoking cigarettes and throwing dice. At the second table a red-haired man in a green-striped shirt was asleep, his head resting on his arms. In the far corner—you couldn't see him well for the layers of smoke—a man with a white face was sitting very still. That was Joey.

" You know how these dope fiends look. Their skin is pale yellow—like ivory; their eyes are bright, because the pupils are extended; and they look—like they are going to die.

" She walked over to where he was and put her hand on his chair to hold herself up, she was so tired. He didn't pay no attention at first; then he looked up, but he didn't recognize her right away—because she was so pale, I s'pose, and he was doped. When he did, he just smiled at her, like he was sleepy.

" ' I knowed you'd come,' he says. Then he drops his head and sits like he was before.

" Annette held tight onto the chair 'cause things was all getting dark to her, she told me afterward. She was all tuckered out you know. And her legs ached her so she almost couldn't bear it to see the barkeep standing up behind the counter. That was all she was thinking about, she told me; she wanted to ask the barkeep if he wouldn't please sit down.

" Things cleared a little after a minute and she found that one of the women—the one with the long black earrings—had come over to them and was touching the baby's thin yellow silk hair with her fingers. The little thing was asleep.

" ' Is his eyes blue?' asks the woman. Annette nodded; and the woman nodded too.

" ' That your man?' asks the woman.

" ' Yes; he is my husband,' says Annette. And the woman nods again.

" ' How old is the—is the kid?' asks the woman.

" ' Ten days,' says Annette.

" And the woman nods again and touches the baby's hair. And she says, indicating Joe, ' I expect he needs food more'n anything else. Wait a second.' She goes out, and comes back with a small tin pail of milk, and she holds it for him while Joe drinks all of it.

" ' Now look here,' she says. ' You're all in. You got to rest to-night. I've got a double bed in my room,' she says. ' You're welcome to it to-night. You lead him back there. I'll show you the way.'

" The other woman had come over and leaned against the bar, and she sort of laughed.

" ' Must be expecting to die, Rosy,' she says. ' Trying to make repentance for your sins, eh, Rosy? You got too many,' she says. ' You're too late, kid.'

" Well, Rosy she turns on her. ' You keep that face shut,' she snaps. ' You keep shut—or I'll tell George something I know about you!'

" The other woman sort of smiles, defiant like, and shrugs her shoulders, but she shuts up.

" Then Rosy turns back to Annette and her face softens.

" ' You'd better turn in,' she says, ' and get a good night's rest. I'll show you where to go.'

" But she doesn't lead the way. She just stands there, looking at the baby as if she's hypnotized. Her lips are parted and dry, and she touches 'em with her tongue like she wants to speak, but she just swallows and doesn't say anything.

" Then—after a while—she says in a low voice: ' Do you mind,' she says, ' if I hold

him—a minute? I won't—kiss him or—anything. I'll just—hold him.'

"Well, Annette she looks at the woman close and hard for a minute, and then she unwraps her shawl-end from round him and holds him out. And the woman takes him very careful, like she was almost afraid to, and cuddles him and rocks with him a little, looking down at him all the time. And presently she looks straight up at Annette.

"'You bring your husband along,' she says. Her voice was funny, like she wanted to cry. 'You bring him along,' she says; 'and I'll show you where you and him and—baby, can be comfortable tonight.'

"Annette gets Joe up; the woman leads the way, toting the baby and crooning to him a little song; and they all goes out of the rear door together.

"The other woman and the man each gets a beer and goes back to rolling dice. The red-headed fellow hadn't even woke up.

III.

"THE next morning," Jud continued, "they started out for home. Annette was most tuckered out, and besides toting the baby she had to half carry Joe part of the way. But she wouldn't stay near that joint no longer, and finally they got home about noon.

"She gets Joe into bed and then cooks up some dinner for her and him. And after he is asleep she goes to the next farm, borrows their horse and buggy and rides off to get the doctor. The doc—you might 'a' known—was sick in bed with the rheumatism; but he tells her what to do and she comes back and starts in.

"I don't know as you ever tried to cure anybody of using dope. 'Twouldn't be so bad in a hospital, where folks don't mean anything to you. But, I tell you, I knows what Annette went through with, because every now and then I'd get up to see her, to ask if I could help.

"The first treatment—what she did that day—is the easy part. She just gave him a great big dose of dope, about twice as much as he usually took, nigh onto enough to kill him. Then she gave him the medicines the doc told her to, and wouldn't let him have nothing to eat and put blankets over him to sweat him and kept this up till he was weak as a rag—he was about twenty pounds lighter, too—but the dope devils was all driven out of him.

"That was the easy part; and for a while after he was so weak and puny he warn't no trouble, excepting to feed. But when he got up and around; that was the worst part of it; and that was what Annette had to stand for seven or eight years—till that show girl come along.

"You may think it's easy to control somebody when the craving gets on 'em—somebody you care for. Annette—Mother Casselvoy—she told me lots about it. 'I see him suffering,' she says; 'I love him. I know there's one thing in all the world he wants most. I can get it. And I can't give it to him.

"'And first thing you know he's feeling like I was a stranger to him. I ketches him looking at me sometimes, sort of cunning, like he was planning and scheming. And then I has to talk to him—to try and get his mind. And he sits very still, excepting his eyes is slipping around; and I know he ain't hearing a single word I'm saying. And then maybe I'll slap him or shake him. But he's just as strong as I am, and he'll throw me away and maybe go outside and walk around half the night, talking to himself and swearing, and sometimes praying, till he's all tuckered out with the worry and everything. And then he'll come in and I'll hold him tight and maybe sing to him; and he'll go to sleep.

"'The next day maybe he'll be all right—and the sweetest man in the world. Or maybe he'll just sit around again, and I'll see him planning on how to get some money.

"'But I manages him all the same!' She laughs—you know how she laughs! 'He's just a bad boy,' she says. 'You have to manage 'em. And he's better. He ain't had a spell now for near a year.'

"She had five children when she told me that, and the running of the farm was beginning to tell on her some. There was a little gray in that red gold hair of hers.

But she never talked sad—unless it was about somebody else's troubles. And as to Joey; he was just the sixth one of her children. 'A bad boy sometimes,' she told me; 'but the dearest of the lot.'

"That show girl; there was a troupe busted up in the village, the sheriff got all of their valuables, and this girl come to the door one day, carrying all her belongings in a little hand bag.

"She was a pretty young thing—couldn't 'a' been much over twenty—with a right good face excepting for that hard, sort of onscruplous look that show girls seem to get; and her hair was gold and pretty too, only it didn't look natural. Her clothes was sort of loud and she had on some kind of fancy shoes—but you know what Mother Casselvoy would do if a person come to her hungry.

"'Come in, child,' she says. 'Take your hat off,' she says. 'Supper 'll be ready in a minute.' And she bustles around and puts on an extra plate, talking all the time just to cheer the girl up.

"'You'll have a good supper. And you'll have a place to sleep, too,' she says. 'You can just stay here until you hear from your folks. From your daddy or your mammy. I guess they'll be plumb glad to find you're coming home,' she says.

"Well, the girl looks at her first like she thinks she's crazy, but presently she gets up of a sudden and goes over and stands by the window, looking out.

"Mother Casselvoy stops talking then and begins humming a little song while she goes on setting the table; and presently supper was ready.

"After the girl had got some food inside of her she was fresh as a chipmunk.

"'When I hear from my friends, I will reward you,' she says, 'liberally.'

"'We don't want no reward, child,' says Mother Casselvoy. 'We just wants to see you happy.'

"'I'll be all right when I gets back to Jake Lewisohn and Forty-Second Street,' says the girl.

"'Who's Jake Lewisohn?' I asks her.

"'He's my friend and manager,' she answers, sort of superior. 'And a good one, too.'

"'He must be a better friend than he is a manager,' says I, thinking of the busted show.

"'You kindly dry up and blow away,' she says to me.

"'Where's this Forty-Second Street?' I says next.

"'Crosses Broadway—Rube,' she answers me. 'That's the Great White Way.'

"'I've heard of the milky way,' says I.

"She laughs at me. 'This ain't the milky way; this is the champagne way,' she says.

"Mother Casselvoy had been feeding the children and trying to keep 'em from making too much fuss, but she seen we wasn't getting anywhere, and she asks her:

"'Where is your mother, child?'

"But the girl shuts her mouth tight. 'I won't talk about my mother!' she sort of exclaims. She gets very quiet; and in a minute she says: 'Where is that Ostermoor you was speaking about? I could sleep on a billiard-table to-night.'

"So Mother Casselvoy shows her where her bed was.

"Now this was all during a time when Joe was having one of his spells. All that evening he was slipping his eyes around like he was scheming how he could get some money to buy dope with. At supper he didn't say nothing, just ate a little bit and drummed on the table with his long, skinny fingers; and I could see the girl was looking at him curious.

"Well, after supper I hitches up and goes along home. And 'twas nearly a week later before I comes back that way.

"It was about sunset, and Mother Casselvoy was standing by the whitewashed picket fence round that two-story unpainted house of theirs. I remember it plain. It was the first time since I had known her—in spite of all she had gone through—that to look at her I knew that something dreadful had happened.

"She had on a checkered apron over an old pale blue dress, and with the soft light from the low sun upon her it would have been a nice, homey sight—only something was wrong.

"Soon I was closer and I could see she was hanging onto the fence and sort of rocking to and fro.

"'Oh! Oh! Oh!' she was saying; and that was all. 'Oh! Oh! Oh!'

"I drove up and stopped, and she raised her head. But her eyes didn't see me; just looked through me at a fixed point. They looked—there wasn't any hope left in 'em; they was sort of dazed. Something had happened that was too big for crying.

"I was scared, and I jumped down. 'What's the matter?' I asks her.

"She just rocked to and fro, and when she spoke her voice didn't have nothing to do with her thoughts, it was just deadlike.

"'Joey,' she moans, 'he's gone—with that girl. Oh! Oh! Oh!'

"I wanted to start something to take that look from her eyes.

"'They couldn't 'a' gone far,' I says. 'They didn't have no money.'

"'They took our savings,' she moans. 'But with another woman! Joey! Oh! Oh! Oh!'

"I couldn't stand it, and clumb back into the wagon. When she sees I was going: 'Jud!' she exclaims, sort of quick and crazy and breathless. 'Jud! What shall I do?'

"'Do?' I asks. 'You know what I'd do. I wouldn't do nothing. It's good riddance,' I says.

"She didn't seem to hear me. 'Can you find out where they are, Jud?' she asks me. 'Will you, Jud? I can't leave the children.'

"'I'll try,' I says, and I clucks to the horses.

"She forgets about me, and sort of moaning, she says: 'Another woman—after everything! Oh, Joey, Joey!' She goes to rocking again. 'Oh! Oh! Oh!'

IV.

"I DISCOVERED that finding them wasn't going to be no easy job. You see, I couldn't ask no questions, because I wanted to keep the thing quiet. But I had the horses, and they was most likely walking, so I could cover twice as much ground.

"Well, I went to the nearest railroad station, but nobody like them had bought a ticket. By that time it was night, and I had to put up the horses and find a place to sleep. Next day I spent on the roads in the eastern part of the county; but no Joey and no girl. The third day I was pretty well disgusted of the whole business. My cash was about all gone, and I sets face for home, figuring I'd tell Mother they couldn't be found.

"You might 'a' known! About dusk, after I'd given up entirely, I come along by a little log-cabin set back in a run-down garden; and there was a yellow-haired girl, pumping water, and Joey sitting near her on the back porch, his forehead in his hands and his fingers twisted in his black hair.

"I just got a glimpse of 'em, but it was enough. The horses and me sleeps by the roadside that night, and the next morning I pulls up at Mother Casselvoy's.

"She comes out to the gate and then I told her. 'I've found 'em,' I says.

"She winces a little, like something had struck her. I expect that, without knowing it, she had been hoping. Anyhow, she just nods, and she says to me very sober and gentle: 'Have you had breakfast, Jud?'

"'No; nor supper, either,' I answers her.

"'I've got some hot breakfast ready,' she says; 'I've been looking for you.'

"She had changed in those three days. She was quiter and gentler; you missed her laugh. In some way, from her manner, I knew she had made up her mind. I don't know why, but I was a little afraid of her. I didn't ask any questions; just told her where I had seen 'em. And all she said to me was: 'After you've finished your breakfast, Jud, and the horses have fed, we'll start out.' That's all she said: 'We'll start out.'

"Presently I hitches up and brings the wagon round by the front door. She leaves the oldest boy in charge, climbs up on the seat beside me, and we drives off, not saying anything.

"'Twas a couple of hours before we come near the cabin. There was a long half-circle of a drive that led from the road up to it. We left the horses where this began and walked.

"We couldn't see the cabin at first for the weeds and bushes, but in a minute we come to an open space and seen Joey sitting on an old soap-box on the porch.

And then—I don't know why—we both stopped.

"I don't believe people realize the amount of feeling that's in even the commonest folks. Most everybody drifts along and nothing ever happens big enough to bring it out. And so if we chance to see it in others, we can't wholly realize it, much less describe it.

"If you've ever done anything unforgivable and unforgetable when you warn't really yourself, and then come afterward to realize all at once what you have done, you will know the way Joe Casselvoy looked when we seen him there on the porch, half in sun and shadow. He was all sunk in; his chin was in his hands; and there was something of unspeakable desolation and hopelessness in his face.

"I didn't look at Mother Casselvoy. We started on again, and in a moment we had got past the bushes, where he could see us.

"He went white as a sheet when he seen Annette. A sort of horror came in his eyes, like he knew his spirit was to face even worser things.

"He struggled up, leaning against the post, his body, in the old black suit, looking frail and thin. Then he raised his head, and with almost a brave air stepped quickly into the cabin.

"We saw him open the drawer of the bureau. Then he turned and faced us with a nickeled revolver pressing against his temple. I expect it must 'a' belonged to the girl.

"Annette run toward him, but before she could get there his legs was shaking and he was trembling all over.

"'Oh, God!' he cries; 'I am a coward, too; oh, God!'

"He lets the revolver fall on the floor, and he plumps down on his knees just from weakness. And when Annette come up to him, there he was, on his knees, his white face lifted to her and his big dark eyes on her face like he was hypnotized with fear and with feelings he didn't understand.

"She came closer, and he shrank away and raised his hands a little to keep her off. And then he must have seen that look of hers in her eyes, for he cries: 'Oh, don't! Don't!'

"She come a little closer and put out her hand as if to touch his hair, but he jerks away. And he moans, 'Oh, no! No! No!' like he was suffering terrible. And he cries out: 'If you forgive me for this—I can't bear it! I can't bear it!' And when she leans to touch him he twists away and throws himself face down on the floor. He seemed in agony there. Then all of a sudden he drops his face in his hands and begins to crying like his heart would break.

"Well, Annette kneels down and strokes his hair. She doesn't say anything, just strokes his hair. And then she raises up and sees the girl for the first time, leaning there in a light blue dress with her back against the foot of the four-poster bed, her face pale and queerly strained, like she was realizing things she had dreamed of but never expected to see.

"Annette gets up and goes over to her. She reaches out both hands and touches the girl's face gently—touches those hard lines from nose to mouth and around the eyes, like she would brush them away.

"The girl stared at Annette's face, her eyes fixed—sort of terrified. She draws back; then suddenly she leans forward and grabs Mother Casselvoy's wrists and looks at her with a questioning, wild look in her blue eyes. 'Are you my mother?' she asks, sort of breathless, like she was talking to herself.

"And then she pushes Annette away and turns off and draws her hand across her eyes.

"'No,' she says; 'no!' She was breathing hard. 'Mother is—dead. Mother's eyes are—blue.'

"She sits down on the bed and swallows hard like she was trying to steady herself. And then she says: 'You reminded me of my mother.' She clasps her hands hard over her knees and bites on her lip and stares on the floor with her body trembling all over. A shaft of sunlight from the window struck her golden head. She looked like a fallen angel.

"Well, Annette puts her hand on the girl's yellow hair for a minute, and she says: 'There's some of your mother in all—mothers.' That's all she said.

"Then she goes over to Joe and puts her

arm under him and lifts him up. 'We're going home now, Joey,' she says. 'Come on home, boy.'

"She raises him to his feet—him crying quietly sort of, like he couldn't stop and shaking; and me on the other side, we goes down the drive and helps Joey into the wagon.

"Annette was about to climb in too when the girl rushes up and catches her by the arm and leans against her, looking into her face.

"'Here's the money,' she says, all breathless. 'Don't blame—him. It was the dope he was after. He didn't know what he was doing. And,' she says, 'I'm going to be good!' She says it two more times. 'I'm going to be good! I'm going to be good!'

"She turned to go back, but Annette catches hold of her. 'Wait, child!' she says. 'Take some of this. You'll need it.' But the girl cries out, 'Oh, no! no!' and breaks away and runs off up the drive as fast as she can.

"Well, Joe lays there in Annette's arms and sort of sobs nearly all the way on the drive back to the house. But when we gets out of the wagon he had stopped crying. And he grabs me by the arm with a look like you sometimes see on the faces of folks at camp meetings.

"'I've seen something,' he says with a light in his eyes; 'something I can't talk about. Take me to a priest!'

"You go in there where you belongs,' I says, giving him a little shove toward the house and Mother Casselvoy. 'I'll fetch a priest to you.'

"And I climbs up on the wagon and drives off.

V.

"Well, sir, Joe had me believing in 'most anything right up to when I heard about this new trouble," Jud continued. "For the last eight years or more—ever since that day we brought him home in the wagon—he was like a man changed and inspired. He worked all he could for Annette—the two years of dope hadn't left him any constitution to speak of, though. And he seemed to look on her like she was an angel, and he'd do little things to make her happy. You know how happy she always was? Well, it was all because she knew for certain that Joey loved her. I know her like a book.

"And now comes this new trouble, after things was going so nicely.

"What has happened over there, anyhow, Jud?" asked Father Gallivan. "We know that she has been shot, but we don't know how it occurred, nor how badly she's hurt. Do you know anything?"

"We'll have to wait for the doc to come back to find out how bad she's hurt," Jud replied. "That's what I come up here for. My horse is lame, or I'd go over there, though I don't know but what I'd be in the way.

"All I know is this: another fellow selling drugs was through here last month. They caught him, and he's now in the jug waiting trial. But they didn't catch him before he'd seen Joey; and I heard yesterday that Joe had been doping again. Like as not his supply has run out. When he comes out of a spell of doping he's a nervous wreck, you know; and if he couldn't get hold of more drugs—"

"Listen!" interrupted Father Gallivan. "Aren't those sleigh-bells?"

"They sure are," agreed Jud after we had listened. "I'll bet that's the doc now."

In a minute or two there was heavy stamping on the porch; the door opened and Dr. Rivers, muffled till only his eyes and gray eyebrows were visible, came into the room. He threw fur coat and cap on the sofa, brushed the breath frost from his muffler, and came over to the fire, rubbing his large nose with one hand and holding the other out to the blaze.

"Cold," he grunted. "Cold!"

Nobody spoke.

"Well," he blurted after a moment, straightening his heavy frame and turning his back to the fire, "I suppose you want to know?"

We nodded.

"It was dope, of course," he began. "When he came out of it he couldn't get any more, and you know how they are. He was practically crazy, a nervous wreck. He believed he could get dope to quiet himself

with if Mother would only give him the money, but of course she refused. Then he began to feel persecuted. He was only a bunch of nerves, you understand, and he began to hate her. She was his evil genius.

"Then he tried to take by force some money she had, but she was the stronger and took it away from him. This made him crazy with rage. He ran over to the corner, picked up the rifle and shot her. The bullet went into the right shoulder, just below the clavicle.

"He raced around then, trying to stop the blood. The shock had made him normal. The girl ran all the way to Perkin's Corners to telephone—in a thin shirt-waist."

The doctor took out his handkerchief and blew his nose loudly.

"When I arrived," he continued, "Mother was on the cot in the big room. He was kneeling by her side, his face against her; her hand was on his head. Poor devil! He has suffered. I believe he has paid—

"When I came in she opened her eyes and smiled. They had been together there, alone, for some time. She smiled.

"Then she motioned him to go out, and when he had gone she looked me in the eyes. I couldn't have lied to her. I knew it meant too much.

"There was about one chance in a hundred for her, and I told her so.

"She didn't seem to mind it much. Asked for pencil and paper, and when I had given them to her indicated that she wanted to be left alone.

"I went out, and found him in the next room—ivory-colored, thin, eyes like a deer's. He followed me over to the window, where I went to get away from his suffering, and touched me on the arm. I told him: 'She has a chance, a small chance.'

"I have never seen such a light of hope. But only for an instant. He knew (it was in his eyes) that his fate was to crush her. And, yet, in his face there showed a faith in her: that she would save herself in order to save him.

"It seemed a long time that we waited. Finally, as there was no sound in the other room, we went in.

"We thought she had heard us. She was smiling. But— I don't know where she got it. Probably had always kept it for something like this. Maybe she, too, knew that hew as fated to crush her.

"She had swallowed potassium cyanid, you know. It takes only a second to do its job. And in her work-worn hand was what she had written. It said: 'I took the poison. According to the law this lets Joey go free. The children are big enough now. God bless everybody.'

"She looked as if she had heard us come in; only she was seeing something 'way up —high. And she was smiling."

It was very quiet in the room then. I heard Jud Bryant draw a long tremulous breath.

"And Joe—her husband?" I asked.

Dr. Rivers threw out his hands in a hopeless gesture.

"Oh, he gave himself up. And even though her action prevents his being tried for murder, he'll be charged with the attempt, or with mayhem; or they'll put him in an asylum for the criminally insane.

"But I think he is longing for the end. He told me that there are things he wants to tell her—that he wants to be where she is." The doctor's expression grew contemplative. "And I believe," he added softly, "that is what she wants, too."

AFTERMATH

BY ARTHUR WALLACE PEACH

HOW sweet the silence after song is done.
How deep the peace that follows wind and sun,
How welcome is the home cot to the rover . . .
What shall be said of Love, when Life is over?

Stones of Madness

by W. E. Schutt

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

STARTLING things came of the seemingly commonplace house-party Mrs. Eleanor Marbury arranged for her guests at Greencliff, her country home near Tarrytown, New York. It was John Gridley who made the first discovery, the body of a man recently killed—a stranger.

Close by the body was a jeweled dagger, which Gridley hid. He recognized the knife as Mrs. Marbury's. And Gridley loved Mrs. Marbury!

On the heels of this first startling find Gridley came upon the body of a fellow guest, General Pedro Blanca. Blanca had been stabbed to death. Still another guest, Dr. Theodosius Bourke, the mysterious giant who called himself "a child of the gods" was overcome with the drug *apnoiin*.

Mrs. Marbury could not be found.

The police were sent for, and with their arrival came the most startling discovery of all: the two corpses had disappeared, and with them all traces of the double murder!

Dr. Bourke, the sinister figure of mystery, admitted calmly to Gridley that he had stabbed General Blanca.

"You dare not denounce me," he taunted. "Mrs. Marbury's welfare depends on my freedom."

When Gridley returned to New York he found his valet overcome with the drug *apnoiin* and the jeweled dagger stolen. Sir George Tipton was responsible for this last crime, but Gridley dared not denounce Sir George because Sir George had seen him secrete the jeweled dagger when first he discovered the corpse of the murdered stranger. Gridley discovered also that Sir George was very friendly with two others of Mrs. Marbury's guests, the Kreitmann sisters.

From Dr. Willis Avery, a medical scientist and an amateur detective, Gridley learned that on the night of the murders Mrs. Marbury, accompanied by a hunchback, left for Nova Scotia. They traveled on a special train chartered for them by Sir George Tipton.

On the heels of this information Gridley was startled by the return of the jeweled dagger.

CHAPTER X.

THE SECOND VICTIM.

GRIDLEY went down-town to his law offices the next morning rather earlier than was his wont. In the first place, the possession of the jeweled dagger was trying to the nerves. He felt much like breathing a sigh of relief when he dropped it into his safe-deposit drawer and heard the great bronze doors of the vault clang shut behind him.

Contrary to their expectations, the dagger had offered no clue, though Avery and Gridley had gone over it with minutest care and discussed the thing until the small hours of the morning. But one extraordinary thing was evident to Gridley, who knew it well before it entered upon its uncanny history: the stone set in the top of the handle was no longer a greenish bloodstone, as it had been in Eleanor's cabinet, but was replaced by one of a blood-red tinge, cut exactly identical—probably a sard or a carnelian.

This discrepancy had been the object of much speculation. Gridley could comprehend no reason for changing the stone, for both gems were of comparatively small value; nor was he willing to admit the probability of the existence of a second dagger exactly similar in all respects.

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

Finally, despairing of arriving at the truth, Avery jestingly suggested that the change in the stone was black magic, due to its having been stained with human blood. Somehow the jest failed: neither man cracked a smile. But now, in broad light, as he threw the dagger into the drawer, Gridley could laugh at the creepiness the remark brought on.

Senhor Itabira, the Brazilian ambassador, who had wired so urgently to fix an "appointment for private and personal conference," arrived shortly after ten.

His excellency was much as Gridley had pictured in his mind's eye—short, stout, and strutting, topped with a silk hat, protected against the November weather by a luxurious fur coat. For the rest he was bald, heavy of jowl, sallow of skin, with a silky, white Van Dyck beard and sweeping mustache stained brown with tobacco, and shaggy, white eyebrows, beneath which piercing black eyes glowed as coals.

He spoke English perfectly, as did his secretary, who was present to take stenographic notes of the conversation.

"Very kind of you, Mr. Gridley, to grant me the appointment," he began, as if he were chanting a formula.

"I might have come to Washington and saved you the fatigue of the journey," rejoined Gridley.

"Not at all; not at all, sir. It's a private matter, a personal affair; please to remember that. You would confer a favor on me by treating it in the utmost confidence.

"The son of our ambassador in Paris, rather a harum-scarum young fellow, has been visiting this country, making his headquarters at the embassy. Last Friday noon he received through the embassy a mysterious telegram, after the receipt of which he left post-haste for New York, leaving as his address care of the Honorable Pedro Blanca, Hotel Somerville, this city.

"Since then he has disappeared utterly. Members of the consulate staff here learned that Blanca went out to a country estate called Greencliff for the week-end, and assumed that young Marao followed him thither. On Sunday a deputy consul-general went out there and found the household in a very disordered and, indeed, hysterical state, from the housekeeper to the lowest servant.

"He was referred to you for every question he asked; and on his putting the matter before me, I decided to interview you in person. For Marao was more or less in my care – that is, I shall certainly be held responsible for his safety; and you can scarcely fail to comprehend the burden of anxiety on my mind at his disappearance.

"Now, from the state of the household and from rumors about Tarrytown, our deputy consul-general is sure that something out of the ordinary transpired at Greencliff on last Friday night. Would you be good enough to tell me briefly what that was, especially if it might concern young Marao?"

Prepared for anything, Gridley's features remained as impassive as if they had been graven from stone, though his brain seethed with the possibilities he saw in the ambassador's errand. In the first place, the murdered stranger, from whose body he had drawn the jeweled dagger, was identified without doubt; and one word from Sir George Tipton would send him, Gridley, to the chair for the murder. Assuredly he was walking on thin ice.

Itabira, scanning him with piercing eyes, saw nothing amiss, for Gridley mapped out his campaign in an inestimably short space of time.

"I'm afraid, your excellency," Gridley began, "that I can't be of much use to you, though you might be able to help me in many ways. Your friend Marao I don't know; I never heard the name, in fact, until this moment. Certainly he was never at Greencliff as a member of the house-party. If he came to see Blanca after his arrival there, it was in secret. What did Marao look like?"

"Very short, slim, swarthy. But exactly what happened?"

"The household was awakened early in the morning by an unusual scream," he said. "On investigation we found that Blanca had disappeared utterly, and that one of the guests had been drugged by a man whose description he gave to the Tar-

rytown police. They concluded it was burglars, and let the matter go at that. I am of the opinion that it was something more than that, and am conducting investigations on my own hook."

"Had it occurred to you that Blanca might have been guilty?"

"No. I understood that he was a man above suspicion; in fact, rather a power in his own country. Exactly what was he, your excellency? My knowledge of him was decidedly indefinite."

"No, I suppose Blanca could hardly be suspected of simple villainy like that," the ambassador returned after a pause. "He was formerly vice-president of one of our neighboring states. His party lost power, and he became a political refugee.

"He has been in Brazil about six years now, I believe, taking rather an active part in shady financial affairs there. At present he is supposed to be engaged in exploiting certain abandoned diamond-diggings in the Itambe Mountains—rather a dubious venture, though probably no more so than the countless schemes foisted daily upon you Americans."

Gridley smiled at Itabira's innuendo.

"Tell me this, your excellency," he asked. "What, if anything, was there between Marao and Blanca?"

"Nothing, so far as I know, though there might have been anything. Marao's financial career will not bear the strictest investigation. His father has been forced to come forward rather heavily on one or two occasions to hush matters up; and the last time I believe that he delivered rather a strict ultimatum against further assistance.

"It is quite possible that Marao and Blanca were allied in some shady speculation or other; but that is mere surmise. Have the Tarrytown police made any headway in running down the burglars?"

"Not so far as I know," responded Gridley. "I haven't taken much interest in that phase of the matter; frankly, I haven't much faith in the theory of burglary, for there was nothing missing from the house."

"You spoke of the guest who had been drugged. Did his assailant compare at all with the description I have given you of Marao?"

"Not in the slightest."

"Who is he, by the way? I wonder if I could see him."

"Bourke is his name. He is a—he passes himself for an Englishman. He left Greencliff early Saturday morning without leaving any address. I don't know where he is at this moment; I imagine he'll turn up sooner or later, and I shall be glad to make inquiries of him in your behalf."

The ambassador scrutinized Gridley keenly, and was met by a glance so open that he suspected neither evasion nor mental reservation.

"I wonder if Mrs.—what's her name—the owner of Greencliff?"

"Marbury," said Gridley gravely.

"That's it. If Mrs. Marbury could give me any information. Our man could not see her Sunday?"

"I doubt it very much. She was very much upset by the incident, and has gone into temporary retirement. I will make it a point to ask her when I see her again. I am positive, however, that your friend Marao was not in the house at Greencliff on Friday night. If he came to see Blanca, he was never admitted to the house. Mrs. Marbury, I am quite sure, could tell you no more than that. Bourke might; but I don't know where he is."

Silence ensued for a space of seconds. Finally the Brazilian spoke again:

"You say you are conducting investigations. Of what, and to what end, may I ask?

"Why should you bother your head about a matter which is primarily the concern of the police alone?" he went on, leaning slightly forward and speaking rather more emphatically than he had done heretofore.

Here, Gridley knew in an instant, was the one weak point in his acting. But he was one too much for Itabira.

"For Mrs. Marbury's sake," he replied in a tone that seemed to make light of it. "I'm her personal lawyer, you see. And since she is much upset about the business, and the police have practically given up the case, I am trying in my own way to put an end to her suspense by finding out the truth. One can hardly blame her, though

I doubt very much whether I'll have any success."

With this explanation the ambassador seemed to be satisfied.

"I suppose, then, that I must go back empty-handed," he said regretfully. "I had hoped to learn something, but if you tell me point-blank that Marao was not at Greencliff, I can scarcely expect anything further from you. I shall have to put the matter into the hands of the police commissioner here and abide by the result."

"I see no other way out of it," commented Gridley. "Of course, if I learn anything I shall let you know without fail. One final question occurs to me: Was Blanca here to get funds for investment in his mines, or for some other purpose?"

"To organize and sell stock, I believe. Still, that is no more than a guess; he might have been here for any purpose."

The ambassador arose, planted his hat squarely on his head, and stood in indecision.

"I did hope to settle this matter without publicity," he said reflectively. "I hate to go to the police; and yet—"

"I'm sure I don't know what else you can do," observed Gridley, rising.

The door closed behind the portly figure and Gridley dropped into a chair with a sigh of relief at having gone through the ordeal so successfully, and pondering upon what he had learned. For the first time there appeared to him, between what had been totally isolated facts, one certain connecting link—diamonds!

For Eleanor's father, Jared Tyson, had made his money in diamonds; Sir George Tipton was a diamond magnate; and now Blanca, it appeared, was primarily interested in diamonds. And Bourke had called it madness!

CHAPTER XI.

VIA WIRELESS.

"AVERY'S all right," cogitated Gridley as the elevator let him out at his office floor, "but a trifle inclined to go off at half-cock; decidedly too impetuous."

Avery was to sail that morning at eleven on the Suabic to see if he could trace the apnoiin-purchaser from the London shop where the drug had been bought. Gridley had taxied over to the pier with him, talked for ten minutes or so, and then left for the office half an hour before the ship cleared. No word had come from Sydney concerning the passengers on the special train on which Mrs. Marbury presumably had been spirited away; no one could tell whether or not the passengers had embarked from a Canadian port; no one, in fact, could tell them anything about the matter. To Gridley this seemed odd; certainly indicative of a false scent. Wherefore Avery's trip became, in his eyes, a wild-goose chase. He hung up his hat and coat reflectively.

"This trip of his," he mused as he felt for his desk-key, "is utterly without reason, and on the face of facts doomed to certain failure. He might better have stayed here, where we could compare—"

The sight of a telegram on top of his morning's mail put a sudden end to his rumination. He ripped it open and passed his eyes over it. He stiffened tensely, and stared at the yellow slip a second time. Came a change sudden and violent—a paroxysm of excitement.

He leaped up so that his chair fell with a crash backward. He tore out his watch; he had just ten minutes. For a brief instant he stood irresolute.

Could he make it?

Then came decision and action. He brushed the morning's mail unopened into a drawer and slammed down the cover of his desk. The fallen chair was in his way. He kicked it half across the room as he leaped for the closet where his coat and hat were hanging. Half-way there he collided with something that finally resolved itself into the person of Arnold, his office manager, who had entered silently with a sheaf of papers. He found breath for two words—"Excuse me"—and emerged from the closet dragging on his coat, his hat cocked over one eye.

"Just a minute, Mr. Gridley," began Arnold, deliberately getting in his way.

"Not a second," snapped Gridley, still wrestling with his coat.

"What time will you be back?" demanded the astonished Arnold.

"The Lord knows. Perhaps never!"

"But you can't go away to-day," objected Arnold. "You've got that Supreme Court hearing on; it's sure to be reached this morning."

"To the deuce with that! Look after it yourself or let it go. Take charge of everything. I'll wire my address later."

"But I can't practise before—"

Arnold left off. There was no one there to hear. He rushed out to the corridor, saw the elevator-doors clang behind Gridley, and returned to the office baffled and alarmed.

"The boss has gone mad," he announced to Harris, the office-boy, in the waiting-room.

The throngs in the street must have thought the same thing. People stepped to the curb, stopped, and turned to gape after the man who shot out of the revolving doors like a bullet and raced toward Broadway.

A sudden gust of wind lifted Gridley's hat off. A messenger-boy shouted to him; the crowds took up the shout; but Gridley paid no heed. His running was thereby the less encumbered; if only he had left his coat, too!

A taxi stood on the corner.

"Pier Forty-Seven, North River!" shouted Gridley into the driver's ear. "Ten minutes to make it; ten dollars if you do it!"

He wrenched the door open and sprang inside.

The chauffeur faced about with tantalizing deliberation.

"Can't possibly do it, boss, at this hour. Traffic's too thick."

"You've *got* to, man! Twenty—yes, fifty dollars!—if you do it. Open her up, for Heaven's sake!"

For a fraction of a second the driver hesitated.

"All right," he mutered. "It's worth a try."

The machine shot away from the curb. Gridley saw nothing of the chase but a confused blur of street-cars and traffic officers. Fortune was with him. Not once was he held up at a crossing until they reached Canal Street. Here the chauffeur tooled his way into the westward-bound traffic, and seconds later careened on two wheels into Washington Street, where they had a clear run north.

Gridley looked at his watch; four minutes left. He pulled out his pocket-book to have the fare ready in case of need. Here a distressing state of affairs presented itself. If he redeemed his promise to the chauffeur he would have just four dollars left, beside what small change he carried.

He reflected an instant. The great doorway of the pier yawned like a cavern in front of him. The Suabic's hoarse siren throbbed suddenly in his ears—signal to cast off.

He jammed two twenties and a ten into a wad and thrust the rest into a pocket. The taxi rumbled over the rough planks of the pier and stopped with a screech of the brake. The chauffeur turned to open the door; but already Gridley was out. He thrust the wad of bills into the outstretched palm.

"You've done it," he gasped thankfully, looking the length of the pier.

But would it avail him? A gang of stevedores was wheeling into place a high picket grating on rollers, effectually to bar passage farther down the pier. Others were gathered in a group around the pier-end of the gangplank, awaiting the signal to pull it in.

Gridley shot past the end of the rolling barrier, caught some interfering personage square with the straight-arm of the old football days, and reached the gangplank—but too late! The signal had been given. Somewhere on the ship a donkey-engine rumbled; the outer end of the gangplank was raised; a dozen beefy laborers put their shoulders to it, and the gangplank dropped with a crash upon the pier. All communication with the shore was broken; the ship, already moving, was off, with Southampton the next stop, and Gridley fuming and desperate on the pier.

But fate or his nerve was with him. He saw the foreman of the stevedores fumbling with the cable that had lowered the end of the gangplank. He slipped past, stood

poised for a second on the very edge of the pier, caught the cable as it fell outward, and held it with a grip of frenzy.

The engine on the ship rumbled again; the rope shot upward, and Gridley was flung, like a pendulum, with terrific force against the steel side of the ship. Sick with the shock, his hands slipped a trifle, tightened, and still held.

Below was the boiling yellow foam of the river. He was grateful for it, for now he was out of reach of the men on the pier, and the officers of the ship would never dare lower him into that filthy whirlpool.

Finally he managed to twist the rope about one leg, and eased his grip a trifle. He was surprised at the speed with which he shot upward. Now he could hear the cries of the row of steerage passengers along the rail, and seconds later a dozen pairs of brawny arms stretched out to him and pulled him in over the rail.

"You blasted fool!" he heard an irate petty officer exclaim. "It's a miracle you hain't killed!"

"That's all right, my friends," gasped Gridley cheerfully, "so long as I'm on the ship safe for Southampton."

"Don't be too sure of that," spluttered the man. "It's ten to one that you go back with the pilot. Take him to the purser, Jeems," he commanded, turning to one of his men, "and don't let him get out o' your sight."

Gridley groaned as he thought of the four dollars in his pocket. He knew he would find short shrift with the ship's officers, having boarded under circumstances so novel. He hoped, however, that the purser would trust him sufficiently to send for Avery, who, he knew, could fix things financially. Therefore it was with a light heart that he turned and followed the sailor up the companionway.

And on the narrow stairs he ran face to face with the merry little doctor.

"'S death, me friend!" Avery exclaimed. "But 'tis a wonder ye are on the trapeze."

Gridley laughed.

"You saw me, did you?"

"Couldn't have missed it. Everybody saw it. You're a hero, me boy; pretty near a dead one, too. I was just coming down to dive after you. Thank the Lord I didn't have to ruin these clothes. But say, talking sense for a change, what in thunder are you doing here?"

"Going to London, if you'll lend me the price of a ticket, a new sky-piece, tips, and various other things."

Avery laughed.

"And poker money for the trip," he added. "All right; it's a bargain. But first I'd like to know why this precipitous-and-then-some haste."

"Found this when I got back to the office," replied Gridley, his face suddenly hardening.

Avery took the telegram and read:

S. S. Morraine, *via* Nantucket, Tuesday.
GRIDLEY,
318 Wall Street.
Need you badly. Take next ship London. Address care Green, Whipley & Co., Pall Mall.
ELEANOR.

Avery whistled. "The Morraine sailed yesterday from New York," he said soberly.

"Yes," remarked Gridley. "Your Sydney clue doesn't work out worth a picayune."

"And, on the other hand," suggested Avery after a moment's reflection, "this may be a mere blind—a false trail."

Gridley stopped short in his tracks and stared at the little doctor. For the first time it occurred to him that there was such a possibility: that, whereas he had exulted for the last fifteen minutes in the confidence of seeing Eleanor Marbury again within a week, now it was not at all improbable that every revolution of the engine was driving him just so much farther from her. It was not a comforting thought.

But the die was cast; it would be folly to try another throw. The three continued silently to the purser's office.

CHAPTER XII.

BOURKE TAKES A HAND.

LIBERALLY supplied with funds from Avery's pocket, his peace made with the ship's officers, his wardrobe replenished in so far as the ship's barber

could fit him out, Gridley spent the first day shooting telegrams across the sea to the Morraine, one day ahead. Fortunately—or unfortunately—the wireless apparatus was commandeered for official business until long until after they had dropped the pilot, or Gridley might have been sorely tempted to go back with him.

First he wired Mrs. Marbury direct:

Passenger aboard Suabic. Wire full details.
GRIDLEY.

The message came back undelivered:

Addressee not known here. No one of that name aboard.

Whereupon he repeated the message he had received, asking the Marconi operator who had sent it. The operator replied that he did not remember, and had no way of identifying the sender.

Next Gridley asked the man on the Morraine if he had really transmitted the message in the first place; and after an interval he admitted that he had, though he had not taken the name of the sender.

Thus did Gridley's alarm grow momentarily. He and Avery held a council of war in a corner of the smoking-cabin, Avery mildly smug over his own justification, Gridley rebellious, unwilling to admit that he was chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. The result of it was that the captain of the Morraine received this by wireless:

Have good reason to believe that Mrs. Eleanor Marbury is traveling on your ship under duress and under assumed identity. Kindly see your wireless operator regarding further details, and give me any information you can.
GRIDLEY,
Passenger S. S. Suabic.

And Gridley was much inclined to keep the reply from Avery:

No one traveling under duress. Cannot interfere with private affairs of passengers without proper authority or reason.
MONCEAU, Captain.

Thereafter Gridley resolved to waste no more money in the little cabin on the boat-deck. He patronized the Marconi man but once more—to send a message ahead to London:

MRS. ELEANOR MARBURY,
Care Green, Whipley & Co., Pall Mall.
Arriving Suabic. Leave any message for me at Green, Whipley & Co. GRIDLEY.

That, he felt, was as much as any man could do under the circumstances. For the rest of the voyage he preempted a seat in the smoking-room and played solitaire incessantly, for want of, or distaste for, any better diversion.

But it was quite another man who at noon a week later jumped off the boat-train in Victoria Station before it had stopped, and made a dash for the wicket. The great, green steamer-cap was the same, and so was the suit that bagged wherever it was possible for clothes to bag. The week's lethargy, however, was gone and forgotten: Gridley was nerved for action, the tensest endeavor of his life.

Unencumbered as he was by baggage, he was the first pasenger through the gates. He jumped into the first cab in the rank.

"Green, Whipley & Co., Pall Mall," were his directions to the cabby, who, scenting a liberal American tip, got the most out of his horse.

Within a very few minutes Gridley stood before the mail-window of the banking-offices.

"Anything for me—John Gridley?" he demanded curtly.

The clerk looked him over from head to foot, yawned in disdain, and turned lazily to the letter-cabinet behind him. Gridley, leaning half over the desk, caught the addresses as the clerk leaved over the sheaf of letters from box "G."

"Nothing at all, sir," drawled the clerk.

"So I see. Just see if there's anything for Mrs. Eleanor Marbury."

Gridley's tone was less buoyant, less hopeful.

"I cawn't give it to you without her permission," said the clerk indolently.

Gridley objected to being patronized, no matter how his clothes stamped him.

"Look here, my friend," he snapped, "I didn't ask you to give me her mail; I asked you to see if she has any awaiting

her. If you don't want to oblige me the manager will."

Upon this the "M" bundle of letters came out with astonishing rapidity. There was only a telegram for her—undoubtedly the one he had wirelessed ahead from the Suabic. And then did Gridley begin to fear that Avery was right, that his trip abroad was worse than wasted, if he expected to find Eleanor Marbury so readily.

He sent in his card to the manager, whom he knew of old, and with that official he arranged for a draft on his New York bank.

"Do you happen to know Sir George Tipton?" he asked the manager when their business was completed.

"Fairly well, in a business way. I believe he's abroad just now. Why? Did you want to meet him?"

"I know he's abroad," returned Gridley, disregarding the questions. "You don't happen to know just why he's abroad, do you?"

"Only indefinitely—affairs of Veld Consolidated."

"Could you find out for me when he's coming back?"

"I'll have a try," responded the manager, reaching for the telephone. "Some time this week, or early next," he informed Gridley a minute later, pushing back the cumbersome instrument. "If I can be of any service to you don't hesitate to command me."

"Thanks," said Gridley reflectively. "I may call upon you later."

Gridley took his departure, and called successively at tailor's, hatter's, and haberdasher's on his way back to the Hotel Gordon, upon which he and Avery had agreed as their headquarters. Here, though Avery's baggage was piled in the sitting-room of the suite he had engaged, it was unopened. Gridley was surprised to find no vestige of the man himself. Justifiably out of patience with the frustration of his hopes, Gridley was wrathful, for the doctor had promised definitely to wait until Gridley got back.

But his impatience was somewhat appeased, though his curiosity was vividly aroused by the sight of a note on the writing-desk, addressed to him in Avery's scrawl. He curtly bade the two bell-boys, who still stood in the door encumbered with his numerous packages, to "throw 'em down anywhere and get out." A couple of silver pieces both palliated his sharpness and expedited their departure.

Thereupon Gridley read the note:

If you hadn't been in such a blawsted hurry, you'd have bally well seen a sight for sore eyes—to wit, two big blacks on a big red automobile.

I'll be back when I get back. Don't wait up for me; I know my way about.

AVERY.

"Bourke's equipage!" ejaculated Gridley. "Bourke in London!"

Followed a vigil that seemed interminable. Gridley dared not leave his room for fear of missing Avery. He canceled the order he had given to the hotel valet to press his sole suit of clothes for fear that a summons might come before the valet was finished.

He had lunch in his room; had an English tea, which he detested, merely to while away the time; dined sumptuously but alone at eight; and between times smoked furiously till his tongue seemed raw.

Big Ben, up in the Houses of Parliament, boomed out nine strokes—ten strokes—eleven strokes. From his window, looking down the Strand he could see the theaters disgorging their crowds.

Came a rap at the door—light, discreet.

"You old numskull," began Gridley gratefully, jumping toward the door and throwing it open.

But it was not Avery.

"There's a taxicab chauffeur below, sir," announced the page, "who wants a word with you."

"What does he want? Let him send his message up," snapped Gridley, disgruntled.

"He wouldn't, sir. He said he came from Mr. Avery and was to tell his message to no one but—"

"That's different. Why didn't you say so at first? Tell him I'll be right down."

Gridley picked up his new derby, threw it back on the table, and grabbed his steamer-cap. For one instant he hesitated between the crawling lift and the stairs, finally took the steps three at a time,

plunged through an after-theater supper-party without so much as a "by-your-leave," and gained the hotel desk.

"Where's that chauffeur?"

"What chauffeur, may I awsk?"

"The one Avery sent for me—Gridley's my name—Suite One-Eighteen."

"You must inquire of the porter at the door, Mr. Gridley. Really, I know nothing about it. We don't permit chauffeurs—"

"No! Of course you wouldn't, nor green steamer-caps either!" exploded Gridley, angered at the clerk's indifference and his outraged glances toward the outrageous head-gear.

A man in the uniform of a taxi-chauffeur stood talking with the commissionaire at the little desk beside the door.

"Are you the man from Avery?" demanded Gridley.

"Yes, sir. Are you Mr. Gridley?"

"I am. What does Avery want?"

"'E sent me to fetch you," replied the chauffeur, looking carefully about him, and dropping his voice.

"Where to?"

"'E warned me very particular, sir, not to tell any one but you. If you'll come outside I'll—"

"Of course. Get a move on."

Gridley stepped out into the street, followed closely by the man. In their immediate vicinity Northumberland Avenue was deserted.

"Now, then," said Gridley, laying his hand on the latch of the taxi-door. "What was Avery's message?"

"'E said, sir, as how I was to fetch you to this address."

The chauffeur fumbled in his pocket and drew forth a dirty card—Avery's own—on which was scribbled the following address:

The Three Buoys, Norman Road.

There was nothing else.

Gridley studied it. The Three Buoys sounded like a water-front saloon; Norman Road he had never heard of, familiar as he was with London.

"Where is it? I never heard of it."

"A pub, sir, in Norman Road."

"And where's Norman Road?"

"Deptford—out Greenwich way."

The chauffeur spoke the name of one of the most disreputable quarters in London—a place which, though he had never been there, Gridley had always regarded as being made up of sailors' and longshoremen's dives, where blackjacks were common as kitchen-knives, and murder was a pleasant recreation.

Instantly he bethought himself of the dangers of ambush. He had neither weapon, nor, at this time of night, any chance of procuring one.

"How do I know you came from Avery?" he demanded suddenly, scanning the man intently.

"Don't arsk me, sir," replied the man blankly. "'E sent me to fetch you; that's all I knows. Ain't that 'is card?"

"Sure; but that proves nothing. What does Avery look like?"

"A shortish bloke, face like a baby's, togged out to kill, talks funny, so I carn't hardly understand 'im."

Gridley smiled and catalogued this exact description for Avery's amusement later on.

"All right," he laughed. "I guess that's the man. Let's get a move on."

The man turned his machine across Westminster Bridge and veered off to the right into a wide thoroughfare, which the street-signs proclaimed to be New Kent Road. From the Elephant and Castle Railway Station, Gridley was in strange country, and took no interest in the journey. Lumbering buses and double-decked street-cars in the main thoroughfare reassured him as much as the sight of the narrow, dark, squalid cross-streets depressed him.

After a full thirty minutes at a steady clip the chauffeur ducked into what Gridley thought was the most loathsome of the cross-lanes. Instantly the foul smell of the water-front besieged his nostrils. But he had short time to think about it, for the taxi had stopped before the Three Buoys. He looked out to see a dingy, ill-lighted, ill-smelling tavern.

"So this is the place, eh?"

Gridley spoke dubiously, swinging back the taxi-door.

"Yes, sir. Arsk the pubkeeper for the American bloke. 'E knows all about 'im."

"All right. Do you wait here or not?"

"Nobody said nothink to me about it. The fare is paid. I'll wait on the corner 'ere a bit."

Gridley entered the low-ceilinged room, murky with cheap tobacco and bitter beer, vociferous with a veritable babel of tongues of every seafaring nation. His entry aroused only momentary surprise from the sailors who crowded the wooden benches.

Gridley stepped to the bar at the end of the room. A blowsy, simpering barmaid, her hands resting on the great levers of the beer-pumps, demanded what his choice would be.

"Draw what you want for yourself," replied Gridley, throwing down a silver piece. "I want to see the proprietor."

She stepped to a window opening into a room at the back of the bar.

"Gen'leman to see you, Tom," she called.

Thereupon an ugly, thick-set, purple-jowled man of forty came clumping into the taproom on a wooden leg. He eyed Gridley suspiciously.

"Where is Avery, the American?" asked Gridley in a low tone, stepping forward to meet the host.

The man stopped stock-still, scrutinized Gridley for a moment, then turned without a word to the barmaid. "Throw me me 'at, Georgie," he requested.

She tossed it deftly across the bar. The innkeeper clapped it on his head and started for the door.

"Say!" called Gridley, standing immobile. "Where are you off to? Where's the man I want?"

"Come along, mister. 'E's down 'ere a bit."

A trifle unwillingly and with ill-defined suspicion Gridley followed the man Tom out into the murk of the street. His guide turned to the right, Gridley remarked carefully, and clumped morosely along to where a masonry barrier four feet high confronted them, on the far side of which, far below, Gridley caught the dull gleam of stagnant water. Again the innkeeper turned to the right, skirting the wall.

In spite of himself Gridley began to feel apprehensive, a trifle nervous. There was little enough of reassurance in the scene. At this hour of the night the embankment was utterly deserted—unless indeed beings lurked in the shadows—and there was not a policeman in sight.

And the tavern-keeper got on the American's nerves with his morose and stubborn silence. And the constant thump-thump of Tom's wooden leg on the sidewalk reminded Gridley too vividly of Treasure Island and pirates and skeletons swinging from cross-trees.

Suddenly Gridley stopped.

"How much longer have I got to stand for this blasted mysteriousness of yours?" he exploded. "Where are we going anyway? Where's Avery, and what's he doing in this forsaken hole?"

"Quiet, mister. We're almost there. I don't know nothink about it, 'cept what I was told."

Tom put a hand to his mouth and made a shrill whistle, at the same time coming to a sudden stop at the top of a masonry stairway leading down to the water's edge.

Gridley stopped.

"Well, what next?" he demanded.

"Wait and see."

There was a swirl of water below, and a small boat shot silently into sight, too far below for Gridley in the half-darkness to distinguish its occupants.

"Avery!" he called down. "Is that you?"

Utter silence! He peered down at the boat, striving to fathom its secret.

Then he felt each arm caught in a grip as of steel. Gridley struggled valiantly but in vain against his assailants until he caught sight of them, when he succumbed as to an ineluctable fate. Gridley was no coward, but the odds were impossible; for he was pitted against two mammoth malicious-looking negroes, whose faces were indelibly stamped in his mind.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERY SHIP.

TWENTY vigorous strokes put the small boat alongside a great, looming, black shadow which resolved itself into a largish vessel. As if by magic a lantern appeared at the rail and a ladder was

lowered. Up this, Gridley, followed closely by the big negroes, quickly climbed. After the shock of the first surprise he realized that resistance was not only futile but unnecessary; for the way matters stood Bourke was not his enemy but his friend.

In fact Gridley was anxious to see the man and force the story from him. He did object to the rather high-handed method by which Bourke had secured his presence, but that was a quarrel between him and Bourke, not with Bourke's servants. And Avery probably was already on the ship.

One of the blacks led Gridley down a narrow companionway into what appeared to be the dining-saloon. Immediately without a word the negro turned back, closing the door after him, and—Gridley could hardly believe his ears—locked it. He stood a moment, reflecting on the possible meaning of this, but finally gave it up with a shrug of the shoulders, and began to look about the cabin.

It was small, comfortable, though not luxurious. A long table, ready laid with white napery and fair silver, had room for a dozen or more, though but three places were actually set. At the far end of the saloon a buffet extended across the end of the room, on which were set out glasses, decanters of wines and liquors, a silver basket of fruit, and a platter of cold meats and sandwiches, specially prepared, it would seem, for his own refreshment.

Four doors, two on each side, opened from the saloon into what he assumed were private cabins, besides the two at the end of the room, which probably led forward to the kitchen and the crew's quarters. In turn Gridley tried them, gently at first, then with all his force, only to find that they were all locked.

From one cabin on the starboard side he was sure he heard the sounds of quiet, measured breathing, too light, he was sure, to be the slumbrous respiration of a man.

Could it be Eleanor?

He wondered, and passed on, ridiculing himself for the thought. Woman it certainly was—or child; but what should Eleanor Marbury be doing, sleeping quietly on a yacht that appeared to belong to Theodosius Bourke?

Suddenly an alarming development took place—one that he had not foreseen. So long as the vessel stood still in the Thames there was nothing especially disconcerting about his forced visit. But now he heard the creak of the capstan—knew the anchor was being raised. Down in the hold the engines began to rumble. The ship was under way, right enough, for some unknown destination, with him a prisoner on board.

He ran to the door through which he had entered the saloon, and wrenched the handle violently but in vain. Finally he sent a yell echoing through the cabin.

He heard the rustle of some one moving about in the private cabin to the left of the door by which he stood. He moved quietly over toward it, grasped the handle, and threw the weight of his shoulder against the door. It flew open unexpectedly and precipitated him into the very arms of Bourke, who, in pajamas and bathrobe and loose, flapping slippers, had released the latch at exactly the wrong moment. Gridley swore volubly and excusably.

"Sh-h!" Bourke warned him, pushing him hastily back out of the cabin. "You'll arouse the others."

"What others? What the deuce do you mean by bringing me out here like this?"

Gridley interposed himself to the passage of the hulking figure; but Bourke pacifically sidled around him, and stepped toward the buffet.

"No harm certainly," said the doctor. "What may I offer you?"

"Nothing, thanks. Precisely what do you want of me?"

Gridley was somewhat disarmed by Bourke's mildness.

"We'll come to that shortly."

Bourke poured himself something and gulped it down.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting here alone. I told them to call me, but—"

"Never mind all that. Come to business. If you wanted to see me with no evil intent why did you go to the length of kidnaping me and bringing me here by force? And where, by the way, is Avery?"

"As to Avery, he did his work and is probably back in his hotel sleeping. Kidnaping is rather a strong word; I merely

wanted to make sure of seeing you before we sailed.

"Sit down, Gridley. I'd much prefer you to have something for sociability's sake. Smoke anyway."

Bourke dropped into a chair and opened his cigarette-case. After a moment's hesitation Gridley accepted a cigarette. He leaned against the back of a chair, waiting for Bourke to continue; but Bourke seemed an interminable time lighting up. Finally Gridley broke out impatiently:

"Tell me this much, Bourke: What do you know of Mrs. Marbury? Have you found out anything about her?"

"All in due time, my dear Gridley," evaded Bourke, puffing out the wax match. "It all depends on you in fact," he added reflectively, swinging about in his chair to face Gridley.

"How so?"

"I wish you'd sit down, Gridley; I can talk better."

Gridley slid into a chair. After a space Bourke went on:

"As I have already told you, Gridley, I am probably, all things considered, the most efficient man on the face of the earth. I have entered this game to win, and eventually I shall win."

Bourke paused as if he were searching exact expression. He had spoken without bombast, simply, as if he were stating a commonplace and indisputable fact.

Gridley studied him, marveling, yet at the same time detesting him. Bourke was impressive even in his ugliness—his heavy, oily features, the blank stare of his thick lenses through which no one had ever looked nor knew what lay behind, the riotous colors of the dressing-gown, which seemed somehow to exaggerate the ponderous bulk of the man.

"To the deuce with your game!" Gridley burst out when the pause became irksome to him. "Tell me what you want with me."

"Once when I was on the point of winning," Bourke began, "I was double-crossed by a man who mentally is a greater rascal than I am. I am even with him now. Now I hold all the cards but one—and that one you hold.

"The question is: Are you going to surrender that voluntarily or shall I have to force it from you? I am amply able to do it; the only reason why I have approached you amicably first is to avoid the delay and the trouble you will put me to by being stubborn."

"Well, what is it?"

Gridley's tone was cold; he had no intention of entering into any future bargains with Bourke.

"I want you to sign a certain paper for me under certain conditions. Just a minute. I'll get it for you."

He shuffled back into his private cabin, slippers flopping about his bare ankles, and returned a few seconds later with a document, which he laid before Gridley.

It was in French, on official paper. It partook of the nature of a power of attorney, doubtless in correct legal form, though Gridley was not in a position to pass upon this point.

Stripped of legal verbiage, it amounted to this: that John Gridley, trustee of the estate of Jared Tyson, on behalf of Tyson's daughter, Eleanor Marbury, did appoint Theodosius Bourke his agent and attorney, to have access to, enter into, and search at will, any property which Jared Tyson died possessed of within the borders of France, whether jointly with another or sole.

"You catch the drift of it, I perceive," remarked Bourke, the old sneer creeping back into his voice.

"You want me to sign *this?*"

Gridley dropped the document on the table and tapped it with a bent forefinger.

"Yes, before the French consular agent in Gravesend to-morrow morning. I have attested copies of the court order in New York City appointing you trustee and a certified photograph identifying you, so that the whole thing will be legal."

"Do you know that Jared Tyson has property in France?"

"That is none of your affair. The sole point at issue between us is whether you will go with me, voluntarily and without disturbance, before the French consular agent and execute that document?"

Gridley laughed dryly.

"Bourke," said he, "did you honestly

think when you brought me here that I'd sign it?"

"I know you will."

Bourke jammed out the flame of his cigarette and rose abruptly.

"I know you will, Gridley," he repeated.

Gridley jumped to his feet, crumpled the paper into a ball, and threw it contemptuously into the corner of the dining-saloon.

"So much for your power of attorney, Bourke! You're more of a fool than I thought you were. I guess that about finishes our business."

"Hardly."

The word came explosively, like a shot from a gun. Yet to look at him, Bourke was cool and suave, with his peculiar smile that was more a sneer.

"At least I've not yet finished," he continued. "And it will be to your interest to hear me through. Yesterday I chartered this ship for a year, and stocked her for six months. Give me your word that you will go ashore with me to-morrow morning at Gravesend to execute that procuration peaceably and you're free to go as you will; otherwise you stay here as my guest until you come to your senses."

Gridley laughed sarcastically.

"A pleasant little voyage, Bourke I must say, though I would prefer to choose my company."

"Very likely you will before you'll have left the ship. And while you're enjoying your cruise what of Mrs. Marbury?"

Gridley stared.

"Well, what about her?"

"At the present moment," replied Bourke very deliberately, "she is lying at the Three Buoys in Norman Road, utterly destitute, a social outcast, and in the gravest danger a woman can be in."

"Bourke, you lie!"

Bourke shrugged his mammoth shoulders.

"As you will, Gridley. Upon my word I tell you the truth; believe it or not."

Gridley glared at Bourke, half-believing, half in doubt.

Bourke yawned.

"We'll be making Gravesend toward five to-morrow morning," he said indolently. "I'll call you about four-thirty to see whether you're going ashore or not; if not we'll go out with the tide without stopping."

He stepped toward a stateroom that opened off the forward end of the saloon.

"Bourke," Gridley asked suddenly, his eyes glued on the shuffling figure, "is that the truth—about Mrs. Marbury, I mean?"

The huge man stopped and turned about.

"It is," he said simply. And then, after a period of silence he continued:

"This is your cabin for to-night, Gridley. I hope you'll find it comfortable. I haven't had time to see to it myself."

He flung back the door, pocketed the key, and walked deliberately around the table to his own door. Here he stopped an instant, his hand on the latch, and looked back at Gridley.

"Good-night," he said; "and pleasant dreams."

And then his door closed behind him. Gridley, still gripping the back of the chair, stared after him in silence.

CHAPTER XIV.

HELP!

THUS was Gridley brought face to face with a most momentous decision. That, too, with a mind overwrought, distracted, sapped of strength by the very torture of the issue and, worse, by doubt. Had the two issues been clearly demarked his choice might have come more easily.

But could he believe what Bourke had told him about Mrs. Marbury? Had this prince of sinners masquerading as a human being any scruples of honor?

Finally he pulled himself together, forced his nerves to steady themselves, and took counsel, and no longer allowed a chaos of blind emotions to rule his brain. After all there was a way out of it without committing himself—escape from the ship.

Once more himself, he entered the cabin assigned to him. This was roomy and comfortable, not unlike an upper cabin on one of the transatlantic liners. But it was the port-hole he had come to examine; and it

was the port-hole from which he turned away with a gesture of hopelessness, for it was barely a foot in diameter, affording no possible means of escape. Save for the door leading into the saloon there was no other exit from the cabin.

He turned back again into the saloon, where the lights still blazed, and set out again to try the doors in turn. He had made no mistake; they were all locked. True, one might wrench a chair loose and batter down the door leading to the deck. But with Bourke within ten feet and an untold crew on the other side of the door—

Gridley passed on to that cabin from which he had heard the sound of gentle, measured breathing. Utter silence!

Had the sleeper awakened? It was not at all unlikely, considering the noise he and Bourke had made.

Was it a woman? After all it was none of Gridley's affair whom Bourke took on his yacht. He started on, but a stealthy movement within arrested his steps.

He clutched the handle of the door and shook it ever so slightly. Came a faint *tap-tap!* from the other side, and the rustle of paper at his very feet. He looked down. A slip of paper had been pushed through between the door and the threshold. He caught it up eagerly. It was not written, but was clumsily inscribed in printed characters:

Leave ship. Help. Amsterdam or Dieppe.

Not the words themselves, but only one phase of the strange appeal burned into his brain like a hot brand; the author of it had taken pains to disguise the handwriting. And what possible object could any but one have in resorting to such a subterfuge with him?

Instantly he clutched the latch again and rattled it.

"Eleanor!" he whispered.

No reply.

"Eleanor! Is it you?" more loudly.

Then from the cabin came a sibilant "sh-h!" cautioning him to silence.

For an instant Gridley pondered. Intuition assured him that it was she. On the other hand if it were she why should she refuse to divulge herself to him?

Once again he studied the note. Assurance was the surer. Eleanor affected the Greek E in her ordinary writing; and here it was before him six separate times—the Greek E, not the Roman E of common type. To him, eager to believe it, this proof was final.

"Eleanor! Why don't you answer?" he demanded in a sharp whisper.

Always utter silence in the cabin! More forcible measures were necessary. Bourke's cabin, he knew, was diagonally across the dining-room. The door was closed; the occupant himself was probably asleep by this time.

Gridley looked over his shoulder to see that all was well. With a sudden movement his hands dropped and clasped behind his back; he faced about abruptly like a guilty child caught in the preserve-closet.

For Bourke stood in the doorway of the cabin—Bourke, sinister and sneering, his hands deep in the pockets of his dressing-robe, puffing a cigarette with every appearance of calm disinterestedness and nonchalance.

"You—you hound!" Gridley exploded.

"Judging from the keenness of your scent," returned Bourke with a tantalizing smile, "the name seems more applicable to you. I read a story in Boccaccio once—"

"You insulting dog!" cried Gridley, leaping toward him.

Bourke stood immobile. Gridley's rush carried him straight to the giant. He let drive a smashing blow with his right toward the thick-lipped, grinning mouth.

The blow never landed. Bourke ducked; before Gridley could continue his balance his wrists were caught and held as immovably as if the steel door of a safe-deposit vault closed upon them. Bourke called twice in some outlandish tongue, and then spoke calmly to Gridley.

"I make it a point never to fight, Gridley," he observed. "I'm too strong to fight with a friend—might hurt him seriously; and I have other ways of dealing with my enemies. Choose your own category. Excuse me for bringing up that story; it seemed so apropos I simply could not help it."

Gridley swore unintelligibly. The com-

panionway door swung back, and Bourke's two big blacks entered silently, coming up so close that Gridley felt their breath on his cheek. At a word from Bourke they caught his arms, while their master strode across the cabin and picked up the slip of paper where Gridley had dropped it before making that futile rush.

Gridley, defenseless, watched Bourke's face as he read; marveled at and feared the wave of passion that swept over his features, distorting them beyond comprehension. Gridley seemed to feel a tremor in the negroes who held him: for their eyes, too, were fastened upon Bourke.

It passed quickly, leaving the heavy face impassive, sneering as always. He dropped the note into a pocket of his dressing-gown, stared reflectively at Gridley for what seemed minutes, and at last started back around the table.

"We won't stop at Gravesend after all," Gridley," he said calmly, "so your sleep won't be interrupted. Get what rest you can: you'll need it."

Bourke added some words to his burly blacks, tossed them a key from his pocket, and went on into his own cabin. Gridley was propelled gently but firmly into his cabin. Then he heard the key grind in the lock.

Sleep of course was out of the question, rest a thing unthinkable. Gridley dropped on his berth for want of something better to do, but his mind was alert. Since noon of the day before, when he got off the Suabic's boat train, he had lived a lifetime which now passed before his mind's eye in startling review.

Where was Avery?

What was he doing?

Had the jovial little doctor deliberately betrayed him to Bourke?

Was it really Eleanor in that cabin across the saloon from him?

Was it possible for any mere human being to avail against Bourke, who all through the episode had toyed with him as he himself might have done with a child of three?

Was there ever an end to it?

And what—

And then came drowsiness against which Gridley fought with all the effort of his will, but in vain. Gridley slept.

CHAPTER XV.

"NOT THAT, BOURKE! NOT THAT!"

WITH two policemen at his heels and a stout little automatic in his right hand he entered the restaurant by a side-door. Sure enough, there sat Eleanor over by the great windows that looked out on Fifth Avenue, dining contentedly with Bourke, who had sprouted horns, and had much ado to keep the waiters from stepping on his spear-headed tail. He could hear the music of her laugh, the light silvery tones of her conversation, the clink of silver against china—

Slowly, unwillingly, Gridley crossed the border-line between dream and reality. The soft laughter of women, the musical clink of silver, were all real enough; but this narrow little room, with its one round window that admitted a flood of golden sunshine—surely this was not Sherry's!

And then with a start he sat up. In the dining-saloon Bourke and a woman or women were eating—breakfast, luncheon, dinner, he knew not which.

He leaped up, staggered a moment with the rocking of the yacht, and hurried over to the port-hole. A limitless reach of yeasty foam, a horizon that rose and fell irregularly; and nearer, short, choppy gray waves that tumbled ceaselessly; this was what he saw. No land in sight anywhere!

He reached for his watch: the thing had run down. He tried to guess the time from the sun, and failed. Then he turned his attention to his neighbors in the dining-saloon, his associates on the ship.

Unmindful of his dishevelled appearance, he made straightway for the door and tugged at the latch. It was locked of course. Bourke suddenly burst out with a hoarse guffaw, probably at one of his own jokes. Gridley felt his gorge rising within him. He shook the door and called:

"Bourke! Hello, Bourke!"

Silence; muffled whisperings; the swish of a woman's skirts; the slam of a door!

Then the key turned in his own lock, and Bourke faced him.

"Oho!" cried Bourke jovially. "Just too late for lunch. Did you sleep—"

"A trifle too soon, you mean," Gridley interrupted savagely. "I see you just managed to get her out of the way in time."

Bourke looked a trifle puzzled at first. Then his countenance cleared, and he went on:

"Yes, we hardly expected you so soon, and she was lunching rather *en déshabille* —in kimono, to be exact."

He laughed.

"Naturally she didn't want you to see her that way."

"Lunching with you—in kimono!" gasped Gridley, incredulous.

"Exactly. And besides I wanted to see you alone. Ostend is our next call. I expect you to go ashore with me there and sign that paper."

Gridley but half understood him.

"Do you mean to say, Bourke," he demanded again menacingly, "that Mrs. Marbury lunched here with you—in—"

"Mrs. Marbury!"

Bourke guffawed loudly.

"No, fool! I told you she is in London."

"Then—who wrote that note?"

"You'll see soon enough. She thought it would help my cause along to do that; but I had to put my foot down. I don't think you'll object to going ashore with me at Ostend to execute the power of attorney."

"It's a blasted lie, Bourke, from beginning to end!" cried Gridley hotly. "I'd see you in torment before I'd sign that paper—before I'd leave this ship when I know that Eleanor Marbury is—"

Suddenly the door of the cabin from which the mysterious note of the night before had come, was thrown back, and there emerged—Gridley almost rubbed his eyes —Miss Katrina Kreitmann!

He heard Bourke speaking.

"My wife, Gridley," he said with a suspicion of a laugh.

"Your wife!" repeated Gridley in amazement, unaware of his boorishness.

"Yes. We were married in London Wednesday morning."

And meantime Miss Katrina—Gridley could think of her in no other way—was blushing furiously, smirking happily, and babbling something he did not comprehend.

"Shall we take a stroll on deck, my dear," Bourke suggested, evidently to relieve the strain, "while Mr. Gridley has his lunch?"

She assented, and Gridley was left alone save for the hovering black servant. He lunched as in a trance, scarcely conscious of what he did.

The mystery of the authorship of the note was solved—but was Bourke's glib explanation of it the true one? On principle he doubted it; yet Miss Katrina appeared to be so completely happy that doubt perforce was banished.

And meantime he was no nearer the solution of his own problem than he had been before. Miss Katrina must work out her own salvation—if she had not already compassed her own perdition.

It was perhaps twenty minutes later when the pair came down. The woman went at once to her stateroom with only a nod and a word to Gridley. Bourke came over and dropped into a chair opposite Gridley, who dreamed over a cigarette and coffee.

"We make Ostend at five or thereabouts —in three hours," he said heavily. "I want your final answer on that proposition —to sign the procuration voluntarily and without any disturbance. You're free after that."

Gridley was clearer-headed.

"Precisely what's your object in having me execute that thing?" he demanded sharply.

Bourke laughed bitterly.

"Folly, I told you: madness—madness, pure and simple. Otherwise it's none of your blasted business."

The giant was in an evil mood.

"What are you going to do about it, Gridley? Speak up, man!"

"You've already had my answer," replied Gridley in an impatient tone.

Bourke eyed him intently.

"Come along up on deck," he said at last, "and get the cobwebs out of your brain. You may see more clearly then."

And in the last words there was a decidedly sinister accent.

Gridley plunged his cigarette into the dregs of his coffee.

"I'll be glad enough for a breath of air," he observed, "though it won't change my mind."

In reality Gridley welcomed this opportunity to look the ship over and see what chances for escape presented themselves; for now nothing held him to the ship.

Bourke stood back to let him out, and stayed behind a second to lock the companionway door.

"What's the object in that?" asked Gridley curiously.

Bourke's answer was a wry face and a disdainful gesture over his shoulder toward his wife's stateroom.

"Do you mean to say, Bourke, that you actually married her?"

Bourke laughed.

"Sure. The little fool's been infatuated with me ever since I met her at Greencliff. I needed money to get this tub out of pawn here in London and equip her; Miss Katrina was the easiest solution."

"And you married her—for that!"

"Sound enough reason. She won't bother me when I'm through with this game."

Gridley shuddered. Perhaps, then, her note had been justified; yet she seemed happy. Still it was none of his affair; at least he had more urgent business.

The brilliancy of the sun and the tang of the November salt air put new spirit into him. He stood a moment by the rail, and inhaled great lungfuls.

She was a trim little vessel, this yacht of Bourke's, forty feet or so in length, rakish, narrow—fast, probably. From where he stood Gridley could look up to the navigating-bridge.

The officer of the watch was as white, as spick-and-span and decent-looking as any officer in the transatlantic service; but the helmsman was black, a giant, as sinister in aspect as the two who were constantly with Bourke; and a big black deck-hand lounged about polishing brasses. Hence Gridley surmised that the entire crew before the mast was a picked bunch of black demons.

Bourke, standing silently beside Gridley, suddenly raised an arm and pointed to the low line along the horizon.

"Ostend, Gridley," he remarked. "Ostend lies there. What are you going to do about it?"

"Time enough when we get there," Gridley returned carelessly.

"No! I want your word now. Your word's good enough for me; but that I want. Otherwise we don't run in at all."

"Don't keep up this foolishness, Bourke," Gridley snapped. "It's useless."

Bourke turned toward Gridley slowly.

"Come along forward, Gridley. I want to show you something."

Bourke spoke a word to the deck-hand, who scurried off. The two men followed slowly, Gridley mildly curious, Bourke in a brown study. Beneath the bridge they came to a stop. Bourke lounged indolently against the rail.

Gridley grew impatient with the silence and the waiting.

"Well, what's the game now?" he asked.

"I'm going to introduce you to an old friend of yours," replied Bourke—"a bigger scoundrel than I am. Here he comes now."

Gridley looked. From somewhere out of the officer's quarters stalked the two big negroes; and between them, walking weakly, half dragged along, was a short, very thin wizened old man, so round-shouldered as to be almost hunch-backed, whose yellowish, parchment-like skin seemed to be stretched over some angular, metallic framework rather than over the features of a human being. The stranger divided a quick glance between Gridley and Bourke and dropped his eyes.

Bourke's thick fingers drummed aimlessly upon the rail.

"Well, my friend," he drawled quietly, "do we learn anything to-day or not?"

"No," muttered the old man. "I don't know myself; so much I have told you."

"I know better. You know what's coming; you can avoid it if you want to."

After a short interval Bourke spoke a word or two in his strange language.

The little man went pale to the lips.

"Merciful Heavens, not that, Bourke! Not that!" he muttered.

Bourke sneered and nodded his had.

Like a lightning-flash one of the blacks caught the little man's wrist, carried it behind his back, and lifted up, gently yet powerfully. The man writhed and screamed with the torture of it; as well might a mouse struggle and cry out against the torture of a cat.

Gridley, sickened by the agonizing scene, leaped away from the rail with an impulsive design of beating off the big black; but Bourke's hands fell heavily upon his shoulders, and he felt himself forced into his place.

Then Bourke's heavy voice boomed in his ears, though he was addressing the stranger:

"Do you tell or not?"

"No—no—no!" screamed the man.

"Fool!" growled Bourke.

And then with a harsh laugh he ordered the blacks to take the man away.

When the decks were once more deserted Bourke addressed Gridley.

"Do you recognize the man?" he asked.

"He's the man who took the special at Greencliff that Friday night, of course. Heavens, man! What an account you'll have to pay some—"

"And I'm able to pay it," Bourke laughed insolently. "More particularly the man is—Mr. Paul Marbury. You have heard of him, I believe."

"Paul Marbury! Paul Marbury, Eleanor's husband!" cried Gridley. "Impossible! The man's dead—lost at sea years ago!"

"You're wrong, Gridley," Bourke denied. "He was saved—the two of us were saved; or rather I saved him."

When after what seemed hours Gridley finally spoke it was with resignation.

"Then that's why Eleanor left so suddenly without a word, without an explanation, with—oh, my Heavens!"

Gridley broke off suddenly. The memory of that last moment with her was overwhelming—that one kiss, that passionate embrace, her flight up the stairs and away from him forever.

"Exactly," said Bourke savagely. "And then he beat her—drugged her—wormed her secret out of her—left her destitute—a creature of shame—an outcast. And now, by the Eternal Heavens, I'll get it out of *him!*"

Gridley, staring out over the tumbling expanse of the sunlit waters, made no reply.

"He knows," Bourke went on more calmly, "and refuses to tell. On Sunday they'll break that arm and proceed to the other, and so on for six months—if he lasts that long. And we'll have two such shows a day instead of one, my friend, unless you sign that power of attorney."

Still Gridley was silent.

"Do you understand me, Gridley?" asked Bourke, touching him on the shoulder.

"Get away from me. Leave me alone, for Heaven's sake!" Gridley muttered, throwing off the hand as if it were loathsome.

And Bourke, scanning him curiously for a moment, shuffled, chuckling along the deck and out of sight.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BARGAIN.

PAUL MARBURY! Eleanor's—husband!

Gridley's brain rang with the echo of the words—a ceaseless echo and reecho that stultified him, rendered him incapable of decision, of action, of any comprehension but of that one fact. Yet act he must—act, decide, do something!

Once at Bourke's forcible behest Gridley had temporized with his honor as a man for Eleanor's sake and regretted it. But on that occasion he had only taken Bourke's word. Now, he had more proof than the giant's mere word that she was in desperate straits; for if Paul Marbury had had a hand in her undoing, the horror of her present position might well stagger the powers of his imagination.

At all costs must she be looked after,

and that at once; her property might go to the dickens, and his trusteeship with it!

He leaned his elbow on the rail, cupped his chin in his hand, and stared out across the mottled sea to where the shores of Belgium threw a black band against the horizon. He tried to estimate the distance—two—five—ten miles. Distances at sea have no meaning for the landlubber. Still, he might swim for it and frustrate Bourke's scheme.

But no; the risk was too great, and this was no time to play fast and loose with death. If only he had something to help him, to keep him up when his strength waned.

The very thing! Lashed to the railing, just in front of him, was a great ring-buoy that would support five men indefinitely. If only he could get it loose, leap overboard with it—

He cast a furtive glance over his shoulder. The deck was deserted; directly above his head he heard the tramp of the officer of the watch, hidden from him by the thickness of the bridge itself.

Out came his penknife. He sawed at the tough, tarred ropes until they parted. One end of the coiled line he tied about his waist. Then, clutching the great ring, he threw one leg over the rail, and—crashed back to the deck with the black deckhand's knee on his chest.

Within a minute Bourke was on the scene.

"Ostend begins to look pretty good to you, I see," he commented sarcastically.

Gridley bit his lip, but maintained silence. At a word from his master the negro got up and lifted Gridley to his feet.

"Fool!" Bourke burst out suddenly. "If you had got over we'd have lowered away a boat and picked you up before you'd gone a hundred yards."

"You—you demon!" spluttered Gridley.

Bourke became more complacent.

"What I want I get sooner or later. You've had air enough for the present; I think you'd better go below. But first the skipper wants to know whether we make Ostend or not. It's up to you."

After a moment's reflection Gridley decided to test the ground, to see how far he could temporize.

"You say you merely want my promise to go ashore tamely and sign the document before the French consul," he said.

"Exactly."

"Do you think you can trust my word of honor under the circumstances?"

"Naturally there's a penalty if you play me false. I thought you were perspicacious enough to see that. I can put my hand on Mrs. Marbury as fast as the cables will take the message; and as for you—remember, Gridley, I draw the line at nothing."

"Small chance of forgetting that."

"Ostend or not? This is your last chance. To-morrow the arm-exercise begins."

"To the deuce with that! Tell me this: My promise, or rather my contract with you, ends as soon as I have signed the procuration, does it not?"

Bourke scrutinized Gridley shrewdly.

"I know what you're driving at, of course," he said at last. "Repudiating the thing on the ground of signing it under duress. I hardly think you'll go to that length. It would put both Mrs. Marbury and you in a decidedly precarious position."

Gridley smiled to himself; Bourke was not omniscient, after all. Aloud he said:

"You tell me, Bourke, that Mrs. Marbury is in London, deserted, in some devilish position or other. Give me a chance to send a wire to corroborate your story. If what you say is true, I'll sign your paper. If not, look out for yourself."

And without a moment's hesitation Bourke gave assent to this bargain, a fact which perturbed Gridley more than he cared to admit to himself. During the rest of the run in to Ostend Harbor, Gridley's mind was occupied in evolving a plan which Bourke could not possibly circumvent by any trickery, and flattered himself that the answer to the telegram would be the truth untampered with.

An hour later Gridley stood in the telegraph office on the dock at Ostend, with Bourke at his shoulder and Bourke's two blacks lounging at the door. Having written the message, he stepped toward the wicket, but Bourke detained him.

"I'll have a look at that," he said.

Gridley gave it up; he had nothing to conceal. Bourke read:

LANGHAM,
American Embassy, London.
Please inquire if Mrs. Eleanor Marbury is at the Three Buoys Inn, Norman Road. Investigate fully, and wire complete details.
JACK GRIDLEY.
Care European Tourists' Agency, Ostend.

"Who's Langham? Why bring the embassy into it?" demanded Bourke.

"Langham's a friend of mine—first secretary. You didn't think I'd be fool enough to wire direct, did you?"

Bourke thought a moment and then snorted impatiently:

"All right. Go ahead and send it."

After the wire was sent Bourke had his two servants escort Gridley back to the yacht, while he himself went elsewhere. At dark Bourke returned to the yacht in an evil humor. Through the locked stateroom door Gridley heard him growling during dinner with his bride; but no word passed between them bearing upon the affair that embroiled them all.

Toward ten o'clock Bourke unlocked his door.

"What time do you expect an answer to your wire?" he growled surlily.

"You know as much about it as I do," was Gridley's reply.

"Depends altogether on your friend—What's-his-name?"

"He'll waste no time about it."

"In such a case you should have an answer back here by to-morrow morning."

"Hope to," Gridley replied laconically.

Again Bourke was rapt in thought. Gridley, watching him from the edge of the berth, observed with glee that the huge man was less sure of himself than he had ever been before; that for some reason or other his affairs were not running quite smoothly.

"I think I'll put you ashore to-night, Gridley," Bourke said at length. "I'll be through with you to-morrow, anyway—that is, if your friend of the embassy is prompt — as soon as you've signed that power of attorney."

"Well, what are you waiting for?" asked Gridley, interrupting Bourke's reflection.

"Let's be off," returned Bourke gruffly, pulling himself together suddenly and throwing back the door.

Gridley was not long in collecting his baggage—the great green steamer cap—and followed Bourke out. Each preoccupied with his own thoughts, no word passed between them until the small boat, manned by four of the black crew, nosed up to the pier stairs.

"Still under guard; eh?" commented Gridley sarcastically when he noticed that two of the blacks trailed at their heels as they started along the pier toward the street.

Bourke merely grunted and turned briskly along the promenade. They did not walk far. After a couple of turns they brought up in a clean little side street of the poorer quarter, which Gridley noted was called the Rue des Petites Écuries. Bourke pulled the bell-cord at No. 34, and the odd quartet was admitted to the house by a loutish, awkward, bristly-headed youth of eighteen.

"I suppose the apartment is ready," Bourke greeted him.

"*Oui, messieurs;* certainly. This way, if you please!"

The lad lighted a candle and led the way up two flights of stairs. Gridley remarked with satisfaction that the house was fairly clean and wholesome; and in spite of the unprepossessing appearance of the half-idiot who guided them, he felt degrees safer than he had done in the Three Buoys Tavern in Deptford.

The apartment to which the lad admitted them proved to consist of two rooms, the first one furnished with two cots, the inner room at the back of the house with one comfortable bed and necessary toilet articles. This inner room had but one door; the windows were closed with heavy wooden shutters.

"Not half-bad for the night; eh, Gridley?" cried Bourke as he entered the inner room.

Gridley cast an eye on the two cots in the outer room.

"I notice you've taken good care that I don't stray away," he observed.

Bourke laughed.

"You needn't be afraid of being robbed, anyway, with the two bucks outside!"

He closed the door and sat down on the bed.

"It's like this, Gridley," he said confidentially. "I'll be busy for a day or two, and since I don't bear you any ill-will, I don't want to interfere with your freedom any longer than I have to.

"I'll leave the procuration here with you. The bucks will take you to the French consul's as soon as you get your telegram, and when you've executed it you can give it to them. Then we're finished; you can do as you like."

"But how am I to get the telegram?" inquired Gridley.

"I'll have them go to the tourists' agency every hour or so to-morrow morning—"

"Not on your life, Bourke!" objected Gridley. "I want that wire delivered straight into my own hands."

"Well, don't get hot about it," laughed Bourke. "You can go with them, if you want to. I'm playing fair with you because I expect you to play fair with me. Only they'll go with you, of course; I must insist on that."

A few minutes later Bourke took his leave. Gridley heard him talking to the two negroes outside. When, at last, the American heard the outer door close, he felt freer in spirit than he had done since he found himself prisoner on the yacht.

He was eminently satisfied with his bargain, the terms of which he had dictated with the foresight of a legal training that Bourke, it appeared, could hardly possess. In the first place, he had chosen aright; as between being free to extend sorely needed help to Eleanor, and quixotically protecting some mythical property of hers, there could be but one choice.

Bourke, it seemed, was already somewhat frightened at the prospect of ambassadorial interference, which undoubtedly accounted for his setting Gridley off the yacht; and, at the same time, he was too desirous of meeting Gridley half-way in the bargain to refuse Gridley's demand to wire the embassy. Furthermore, the news from the embassy was sure to be authentic. All in all, Gridley felt he deserved a high compliment for his shrewdness.

Now, he reasoned, if the embassy replied that Mrs. Marbury were not at the Three Buoys, the chances were that his intuition regarding that little note on the yacht had been right; in such a case he would refuse to sign the procuration and return to the yacht, where he might be of assistance to her in some way. If she were at the Three Buoys he would devote himself first to lending assistance to her; whereupon there were ways of circumventing Bourke's designs upon Jared Tyson's property without repudiating the power of attorney.

Eminently contented, he slept like a tired laborer, and awoke in the morning ready to accept without protest and play to a finish any hand Fate might deal him.

But the hand he really got was so totally unforeseen and unimaginable that whereas he thought the game was nearly done he found it barely started.

CHAPTER XVII.

ONE MORE VICTIM.

BOURKE'S yacht was gone!

This was the first thing Gridley noticed when he got out on the quay the next morning for a brisk walk down to the tourist agency. He was inclined to doubt even his own eyes, though assuredly there was not a ship in the whole panorama of the harbor that came within twenty feet of her measurements.

For corroboration he turned to the two blacks, who trailed him like direful shadows. But Bourke had them well trained; all the information he could get out of them was a noncommittal grunt from the one and a mumbled "'Pears to be" from the other. Wherefore the disappearance of the yacht remained a fact without explanation, and Gridley bothered his head about it no longer.

He led the strapping negroes a pretty pace on toward the agency, reveling in the keenness of the salt air and the sunny morning, exhilarated with the anticipation of something definite at last. He was totally unmindful of the queer figure he

must have made along the crowded, fashionable promenade, unshaven and unbrushed, in his baggy clothes and steamer cap, with the two mammoth blacks stalking along a pace behind, like two constantly attendant and malevolent jinnees.

The agency at last, the mail-wicket, and —the telegram.

Gridley's blind impatience to see the contents of it shut his eyes to all else—especially to the fact that a second piece of mail was pushed out to him. He ripped open the wire.

Person you seek is at Three Buoys, destitute, abandoned by the man who brought her there; seems to be a morphin fiend. Wire if you can do anything. LANGHAM.

Gridley jammed the message into his pocket.

"What time is the next boat to London?" he demanded of the clerk.

"Ten o'clock, sir."

Gridley shot a glance at the wall-clock. There was half an hour to spare. He turned to one of the negroes who hovered at his shoulder.

"Come on, now! Get a move on if you want that paper!" he cried, leading the way toward the door.

The mail clerk called him back.

"A letter for you, Mr. Gridley."

Gridley swooped upon it, caught a glimpse of the crabbed, strange handwriting, and thrust it into his pocket with the telegram. There was time enough to read notes from strangers when this more pressing business of his was finished.

On the way to the French consulate he stopped at a telegraph office long enough to despatch the following:

LANGHAM, Embassy, London.

Re Mrs. Marbury; Please give matter your personal attention; remove her at once; do all in your power to alleviate her condition. Arriving next boat. JACK.

But his plans fell through. The consul had not arrived; was not expected until the regular office hours, which began at ten. Gridley demanded that the negroes go with him at once to the consul's house to execute the papers.

They compromised on telephoning for him to hurry down to legalize the documents. The consul had left his house for the office, and might be expected any minute. Wherefore Gridley, half beside himself with baffled wrath and futile rebellion against fate, sat down to wait, comforting himself as best he could with the fact that Langham was on the spot, at any rate, and could be depended upon.

The clock hands raced. The consul was on time, throwing back the office door—just as the hoarse siren from the harbor announced the departure of the London packet boat.

Minutes later Gridley found himself, as in a dream, solemnly swearing to the French formula—"That I execute the above document freely and voluntarily, without mental reservation or evasion—"

The consul added his legitimation and applied the great seal. As they left the building, Gridley tossed the procuration to one of his dusky satellites, and was immeasurably relieved to see them abandon him and go their own way.

He had no interest in where they went. He was through with them, through with Bourke, through with the whole devilish game—or would be as soon as he had got Mrs. Marbury safely on the next liner for New York. He was free—free for the first time since that horrible night at Greencliff now nearly two weeks gone, though the price of his freedom he had yet to pay.

Before the next boat to London he had eight hours to kill. He turned into the first side street and strolled along aimlessly until he came to a small café with its round-topped metal tables and chairs half-screened from passers-by by a tub-grown hedge of evergreen, occupying half the sidewalk.

The chill in the November air had driven indoors all the patrons of the café; but Gridley, welcoming the seclusion, dropped into one of the outdoor chairs, beckoned out a waiter, and ordered coffee.

When the shivering garçon had served him and gone back, Gridley drew out the note he had received through Cook's. It was written in bad French:

M. GRIDLEY:

I have the honor of addressing you, by refer-

ence from his excellency the Brazilian ambassador at Washington, regarding certain matters of the gravest importance to me as well as to yourself. I refer to the yet unexplained disappearance of my son Alfonso.

I have the pleasure of believing that a conference on the subject and a mutual sharing of knowledge would be of value to both of us.

I take this sole means of communicating with you, and await with the utmost anxiety the honor of a note from you or a call from you at the Hotel Esplanade.

Accept, I beg of you, every assurance of my personal consideration.

VIEGO MARAO.

Gridley's first decision was to write briefly, saying that the business was finished, so far as he was concerned, and that urgent affairs took him away. As he reflected, however, he could not find the heart to refuse the father an interview; and, in fact, considering how much he really knew about young Marao, it was clearly inexpedient for him to disregard the request.

He finished his coffee leisurely, retraced his steps to the quay, and strolled along to the Hotel Esplanade.

"Are you Mr. Gridley?" asked the clerk in answer to his request.

"Yes."

"M. Marao," he went on, "went out some time ago, and left word that if you called for him you should wait for him. He promised to be back in fifteen minutes, but I see he hasn't returned yet."

"How long has he been gone?" asked Gridley.

"An hour, I should say."

"Thanks. I'll wait for him."

Gridley bought a couple of newspapers and stepped into the smoking-room to wait.

Luncheon-time came and no sign of Marao. Gridley lunched at the hotel. And as Marao's absence was prolonged, so did Gridley's apprehension for him become acuter. For if the Brazilian were as anxious as he expressed himself, surely he would not stay away so long voluntarily.

On the other hand, Bourke's negroes had been at his shoulder when he received the note and could not have failed to see the handwriting on the envelope.

During the course of the afternoon Gridley made a fruitless journey back to the tourist agency and inquire for Marao, more to while away the time than anything else. The clerk knew nothing of him, nor did he remember the Brazilian.

Gridley shrugged his shoulders — one more in the meshes of Bourke's net—and thanked a benevolent fortune he was well out of it. He felt his duty toward Marao accomplished when he should have reported the incident to the Brazilian ambassador in London.

And with his mind at ease on that point he embarked on the London packet boat at six o'clock.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT PEG-LEG KNEW.

NOT knowing exactly where to find Langham until the embassy opened, Gridley got off the boat Saturday morning at the Greenwich dock, and by dint of inquiry found his way to the Three Buoys in Norman Road. It might have been because of the unwonted brightness of the early morning sun; it might have been because he felt that his goal was at last in sight; whatever the cause, certain it was that now saw only the picturesque and the colorful, where but three nights gone the murky squalor of the neighborhood had assailed his every sense, and filled him with misgiving and loathing.

Even the overpowering early morning reek of the Three Buoys' barroom did not dampen his enthusiasm. Save for the barmaid it was deserted; she was leisurely polishing the display tankards. She recognized him and nodded in a way that betokened astonishment, though she did not give oral expression to it. Gridley ordered up half a pint of bitter as an excuse for talking.

"Where's the boss?" he asked in an agreeable tone.

"You mean Tom—'im wiv the wooden leg?"

"Exactly," acquiesced Gridley. "Old peg-leg."

"Better not let 'im 'ear you speak so disrespectful. 'E's a bad un w'en he gets dahn on a bloke," she smirked, setting her plump elbows on the bar and leaning for-

ward confidentially. "Now, just wot do you want wiv 'im?"

"To thank him for the ocean voyage he gave me the other night," laughed Gridley. "But where is he?"

"So that was 'is game; eh?" she exclaimed knowingly. "Most blokes 'e sends to sea don't get back so soon."

Gridley pondered a moment over this rather cryptic utterance, and finally read a meaning into it.

"Oh, he didn't shanghai me!" he asserted. "I've got nothing against the man himself. I just wanted to see him, to ask him a question or two."

"P'r'aps I could do as well," she suggested winningly.

"Hardly. Can I see Tom or not?"

"I'm afraid not. I don't know if 'e's awake yet. 'E sleeps late, 'e does, and takes on somethin' orful if 'e's aroused!"

"Then I won't disturb him. I suppose there was some one here from the American embassy."

"Yes, a bloomin' toff! W'y?"

"And he took the American woman away with him?"

Instantly her features underwent a quick change. She glanced quickly over her shoulder toward the door at the back of the bar, and leaned farther toward Gridley.

"Listen!" she whispered. "Don't let Tom—"

Then came an unearthly howl from the back room:

"You, gal, come 'ere."

With a grimace of fear and hatred Georgiana picked up her cloth and set to polishing viciously. Gridley heard the thump-thump of the wooden leg, and the door was flung open to disclose the snarling, repulsive face of the tavern keeper.

"No, she don't know nothink abaht any woman," he growled. "Wot do you want to know?"

Gridley turned slowly toward him.

"You seem to have heard my question?" he observed.

"Well, she's gone," he snapped.

"That's all I wanted to know," said Gridley. "You needn't have lost your hair about it!"

The innkeeper scowled savagely and clumped his way toward the middle of the bar, displacing the barmaid who proceeded to go on with her polishing.

"Now then," he spluttered, "if you wants a drink s'y so; if not—"

"Wait till I've finished this," said Gridley with a provoking smile.

Leisurely he drank down the brew merely to tantalize his host. He had got all the information he wanted and was grateful for it; for now he knew that Langham had been zealous in his quest. Finally, to the innkeeper's evident relief, he threw a couple of coppers on the bar, bade a jovial farewell to the pouting Georgiana, and walked out.

He looked up toward the dingy, repellent upper part of the house with its closed wooden blinds and general dilapidation, eloquent of the sinister events that undoubtedly had taken place within. He shuddered at the very thought that Eleanor had been sequestrated there for even a moment—wondered what might not have happened to her had he not been able to release her.

Slowly he walked on toward Greenwich Road to find a cab. For one thing at least he thanked Heaven—that he had been wise enough to call Langham into the affair; for if Langham, with all the power of the embassy behind him, had done his simple duty, she was now in safe hands at any rate.

Langham fortunately was a comparatively early riser, so that by the time Gridley arrived in Victoria Street shortly after nine, the dapper first secretary was leisurely opening his mail. The greetings were cordial, though Langham, debonair and a fashion-plate, seemed to regard Gridley rather quizzically.

"Is it really you, Jack?" he laughed. "If so what's the occasion for the masquerade?"

Gridley surveyed himself mock-ruefully.

"Thank the Lord I haven't worn holes in 'em!" he laughed, "for I haven't had time to get 'em patched. I know I'm a holy sight, Dick, but actually I have had no time to think about it. I suppose everything's all right now."

"Meaning?"

Langham's eyebrows went up in the best approved French fashion.

"Meaning Mrs. Marbury, of course. How is she, anyway?"

"Oh, Mrs. Marbury," repeated Langham reflectively. "I remember. By the way, Jack"—and here he set to fumbling over his morning's mail—"I found your telegram from Ostend just before you came in. I'm very sorry; I was just going to send—"

He had found the message and handed it to Gridley, who stared at it horrified.

"Great Jupiter, Dick!" cried Gridley, clutching for the message and scanning it rapidly. "Do you mean to say that you got this wire only this morning—this morning?"

"Why, yes. I was in Oxford all day yesterday—left early in the morning and got back at midnight. Was it so urgent?"

"Urgent!" Gridley jerked out, rising hastily and pacing back and forth. "Urgent! Heavens! I should say so!"

Langham's eyes followed him with surprise. Gridley came to a sudden stop in front of his desk.

"Then it wasn't you who took Mrs. Marbury away from that hole down on the water-front?"

"No."

"Nor any other member of the embassy?"

"Not to my knowledge. Who, by the way, is this Mrs. Marbury? What kind of business are you mixed up in?"

"Don't you know her? Didn't you see her? Didn't you send me that telegram to Ostend?"

"I sent the telegram, yes. When I got your first wire I sent an embassy clerk down to the tavern—"

"And you didn't go yourself?" Gridley interrupted with a groan.

"No. I was in charge here that day and couldn't get off. The man I sent is absolutely trustworthy; shall I have him in?"

Langham's fingers poised above the bell, but Gridley overlooked his suggestion.

"Blighted fool that I was!" cried Gridley bitterly. "I ought to have insisted on your personal investigation."

"I don't see how I could have done more than Jenkins did," objected Langham. "I couldn't possibly have attended to it in any case. Why, after all, should you be interested in any woman in that sphere?"

"That sphere! She was Eleanor Marbury—you know her—Jared Tyson's daughter."

"Eleanor Tyson!" exclaimed Langham. "Why on earth didn't you say so, Jack? I'd forgotten whom she married: the name wasn't familiar to me at all."

Langham jumped to his feet.

"Come on, Jack! We'll run down there right away. No; first we'll hear again what Jenkins has to say. He wired the report himself in my name; so I don't know anything about it.

"If only you'd told who it was, man! I thought it was just the common type of fugitive or eloper or something even worse."

He touched the call-bell on his desk and summoned Jenkins, who came in noiselessly ten seconds later. He was a perfect type of the London clerk, middle-aged, bald, dressed in a frayed and rusty frock-coat, most dignified, most deferential, most uncommonly proud of his high position in the world.

"Jenkins," Langham began, "you investigated that case of Mrs. Marbury day before yesterday, did you not?"

"I did, sir."

"And what did you find?"

"First I saw the pubkeeper—excuse me, sir, the proprietor of the tavern—a certain Mr. Hatkins—Atkins, I mean, sir. He told me that a little, old, round-shouldered, poorly-dressed man brought her there on last Choosday night, very late, and left alone on Wednesday morning. You understand, sir, that it is not the most respectable hotel in the world.

"Mrs. Marbury was still there when I called. She appears to be addicted to the use of drugs, and was badly under the influence of opium when I saw her."

"You saw her then?" demanded Gridley eagerly.

"Yes, sir, I did."

"And how was she? How did she look?"

"Most disrespectable. None too clean—none too—ahem—fully dressed. I left, sir, as soon as I could."

"What did she say?"

"Nothing much, sir. She was too much under the influence of morphin to talk much. She did say she wanted to be left alone."

"Who told you she was a drug-fiend?" Gridley demanded incredulously.

"Mr. Hatkins—Atkins, sir."

"She'd probably been drugged pretty heavily," growled Gridley, "and the pub-keeper thought she was a coke-fiend."

"She was right enough and gay enough when she came there, so Mr. Atkins said," Jenkins objected.

"How do you know it was Mrs. Marbury at all?" put in Langham suddenly.

"She said that was her name."

"Could you describe her?" requested Gridley.

"No, sir. The room was too dark to see her plainly."

Langham and Gridley exchanged glances of relief. Perhaps after all it was not Mrs. Marbury; a visit to the tavern must settle matters one way or the other.

"That 'll do, Jenkins," said Langham after a pause; "that is," he amended, "unless you want to ask more questions, Gridley."

Gridley shook his head. Jenkins bowed stolidly and went out. Langham called for his car, and minutes later he and Gridley whirled along Victoria Street and out across Westminster Bridge.

Peg-leg Tom was very much awake by the time they arrived at the Three Buoys; even from the corner of Greenwich Road Gridley heard him railing at the barmaid. And as the car stopped in front of the smoky window he heard these words plainly:

"See there, now, gal, wot you've done! More toffs from the hembassy! 'Struth, but you'll be the ruination of me yet!"

But as soon as the two men entered the barroom the ugly mood was dissipated. Tom clumped forward to meet them, with his best attempt at an engaging smile.

At Langham's suggestion Gridley kept in the background. His blood boiled as he heard the story which Langham elicited from the man. In general it was the same as that related by Jenkins at the embassy; but the tavern-keeper dilated upon it and furbished it with harrowing details which, for the most part, were undoubtedly drawn from his imagination.

The description of the man who had brought her there corresponded exactly with Marbury—so far was Bourke's story corroborated. Furthermore, it was evident that she had not been drugged when she was brought there, if Atkins's story was to be credited; a fact which made the embassy clerk's tale the more repellent.

And finally Langham came to the subject of her identification.

"She gave the name 'Marbury,'" Atkins asserted.

"Yes, yes; I know that," said Langham. "But I could have given the same name. What did she look like? Have you any proof that it was really the Mrs. Marbury we are looking for?"

"Pretty as a picture," replied the tavern-keeper. "Brown hair, brown eyes; what you might call delicate features. I've got somefin of 'er's 'ere, wot I took against 'er lodgin'-bill, if you wants to 'ave a look at it."

"We certainly do," said Langham.

Atkins thumped across the floor toward the door at the back of the bar. Suddenly he stopped short. Gridley, watching him closely, saw him lower suspiciously at the barmaid, who stood by the window in what appeared to be a fit of the sulks.

"Now, then, me gal," he roared, "run along in and fetch aht that jooelry."

He emphasized his command with a resounding clump of his wooden leg.

For a moment she glared at him in rebellion; but at last, stirred to action by a repetition of the thump on the floor, she moved off slowly and unwillingly.

"Trouble of some kind here," Gridley thought.

And even as his mind reverted to the sounds of the quarrel between the girl and her employer she reappeared in the doorway. Their eyes met for an instant; and in that glance it was clear enough that she tried to tell him something, though just what, he could not divine.

Atkins hurried toward her in alarm. She gave him a tiny packet done up in coarse paper and again took up her stand by the

window. The tavern-keeper came out from behind the bar, unrolling the paper as he walked.

"This, now," he said, "would you know it?"

He held up to Gridley's eyes a diamond and pearl lavaliere.

"Know it!" Gridley interrupted, taking a hasty step forward. "Of course I would. That's Mrs. Marbury's, all right. No doubt about that! How did you get your dirty hands on it?"

"Wot'll you give me for it, guv'nor?" asked the man shrewdly.

"I'll give you nothing; I'll have you up before a magistrate for stealing it."

"No, you won't! I took it as security for 'er lodgin': I've a right to it, I 'ave. Make me an offer. Maybe if you offers me enough I'll tell you where she is."

Gridley deliberated. The pendant was worth possibly as much as five thousand dollars; but the careless way in which the man handled it and offered it for sale made him secure in the belief that Atkins doubted its genuineness.

"What do you think it's worth?" he temporized. "What'll you take for it?"

"Well," responded the man, cocking one eye, "I don't think a woman o' that kind would have anythink so very expensive. Le's s'y five quid, and I tell you where she is."

"Done. It's a bargain."

Gridley drew a five-pound note from his pocketbook and exchanged it for the lavaliere. "Now tell me where the woman is," he insisted.

"Gone," said the man with a leer.

"Tell me, my man," asked Langham; "with whom did she go away?"

"She went alone—late last night."

Gridley, who had controlled himself admirably throughout the interview, sprang forward in a sudden access of rage and alarm.

"You lie, you rascal!" he cried hotly. "I wouldn't believe you on your oath. Some one took her away, or else she's here still."

"Don't give me the lie, you bloomin' toff," snarled the man, bristling up. "It's the truth I'm tellin' you."

Gridley, pale to the lips and trembling with wrath, scanned the leering face keenly. His fingers ached to dig into the black, sinewy throat, but that would gain him nothing. Langham, in alarm, seized his elbow, but Gridley shook off his friend.

"This is my quarrel now, Dick," he said. And then to Atkins: "Tell me the truth, you scoundrel," he threatened, "or I'll lodge complaint against you for kidnaping sailors."

Again the man leered at him shrewdly.

"So it's the truth you want, eh, guv'nor—th 'ole truth, and nuvvin' but the truth?"

"That's what I want."

"Blimy, then, but you'll get it. I threw 'er out larst night 'cos she didn't 'ave a copper to bless herself wiv. I carn't afford to lodge 'er and feed 'er for nothink, can I? Wot you got to say abaht that?"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE JEWELED DAGGER AGAIN?

THE ride back to civilization passed in comparative silence. Gridley found small comfort in Langham's résumé of the case: that the innkeeper had acted entirely within his rights, even though his action had possibly been precipitated by fear of the embassy's interference after Jenkins's visit; that Eleanor would undoubtedly seek aid from the embassy, the consulate, or from some of her many friends; and finally that the case would be brought at once to the attention of the high authorities by the embassy, if information concerning her had not already come to the embassy through the police.

Gridley heard him through and still doubted. His mind dwelt always upon the barmaid's extraordinary demeanor, her quick, enigmatic glance, and her employer's quick interference of the earlier morning, with the succeeding quarrel between them.

Certainly Georgiana knew more than she dared to admit before the tyrannical Atkins; what that might be Gridley could not fathom unless he could have a private interview with her.

That Mrs. Marbury had left the place he could not doubt from the tavern-keeper's

attitude and explanation: but that she was now a free agent he could hardly concede.

It was useless to argue further with Langham. In the first place, his interest in the matter was only passing and casual; secondly, his smug belief in the moral power of the embassy as avenger was ineradicable; and lastly, as Bourke had put it, Langham could not see through the brick wall.

"Such offenses as you suggest, Jack," Langham had said with a supercilious smile, "could hardly happen in London, especially when the American embassy is known to be interested in the case. This is the best policed city in the world. They'll find her, right enough."

Whereupon Gridley passed in silent review the unbelievable events of the past fortnight and preserved his peace. There is no mind less open to argument than the smugly contented one; and Langham was evidently satisfied, to judge from the calm and provoking smile he wore, that his advice was the last word on the subject.

Gridley broke the silence as they left the Surrey side and crossed once more in the shadow of the Houses of Parliament.

"If it's all the same to you, Dick," he said, "you might run around and drop me at Green, Whipley's. There may be some mail for me."

"Sure thing; and then where?"

"Oh, I'll walk back to the hotel. You needn't bother any more on my account."

Langham leaned forward and spoke a word to the chauffeur, who tooled his car into the Whitehall traffic.

"Where are you going to stay?" Langham asked.

"Had a bill for the suite running at the Gordon since Wednesday noon," said Gridley resentfully. "I haven't had much use of it, though. I imagine Avery 'll be there."

The car drew up at the curb in front of the banking-offices.

"Well, so long, Jack," said Langham. "I'll keep you posted if anything happens. Meantime I suppose there's nothing to do but wait."

"No, I suppose not," replied Gridley rebelliously.

And both were wrong.

There was no mail for Gridley; nor had his wireless to Eleanor been delivered. He returned to the hotel hopeless. Everything in his room was as he had left it—the note from Avery telling him of having seen Bourke; the doctor's unopened baggage piled in the sitting-room; his own packages from tailor and haberdasher. In short, here was a state of affairs that was farthest from his mind—Avery had not been near the place!

He dropped into a chair as if every ounce of strength had surged suddenly from his body. True, he might have expected it; for he had never believed Bourke's story that the jovial little doctor had deliberately betrayed him. But coming as it did on top of the other shocks of the morning, he imagined the worst.

He even found himself making a count of the victims of the game: Pedro Blanca, the Maraos, father and son; Eleanor, and now Dr. Avery. Soon he would have to use the fingers on both hands.

Yet he knew no more about it now than he had known that memorable Friday night at Greencliff, except that Paul Marbury was involved in it; and that was hardly a reassuring fact. And he must wait—wait and do nothing—wait with his hands tied while Bourke's machinations crushed the very life out of him.

In such a mood the rap on the door mocked him like a death-knell. It was merely a bell-boy with the card of—Gridley could hardly believe his eyes — Viego Marao!

"Send him up," bade Gridley with a vehemence that made the boy look at him in surprise. "And say," Gridley went on, "Send up something to drink right away—a bottle of ginger ale and a siphon. Now, then, don't dawdle!"

The boy darted away. Gridley found a cigar, lighted it and opened up the windows to get the stuffiness out of the place. He was beginning to be himself once more.

By the time the boy returned with the tray, with Marao at his shoulder, Gridley was as he had always been with strangers —alert, reserved, poised for any developments.

Marao was of the powerfully built type

of Latin races—tall, well-knit, imposing of bearing, exquisitely dressed, with a lean, leathery, rugged face; iron-gray hair, mustache and imperial. The unmistakable air of one used to command was accentuated by the bold, piercing scrutiny of his black eyes.

Here, Gridley felt at once, was either an invaluable ally or a resourceful and relentless enemy. With which category was he to be reckoned?

"Have I the pleasure of addressing M. Gridley?" Marao asked formally in French as he stopped on the threshold and inclined his head slightly toward Gridley.

"*Oui, monsieur,*" replied Gridley. Then the ludicrousness of it struck him; he added, laughing:

"At last."

The restraint was broken. Marao, too, laughed.

"I've had the dickens own time catching you," he observed, closing the door behind him.

"I waited for you all day yesterday at the Esplanade," said Gridley. "I began to think that—that—"

"Too bad, too bad. My impatience is to be blamed. The clerk at the tourist agency, to which I had been referred by your embassy here in London, said that you had taken the ten o'clock boat to London—heard you say so to the men you were with; whereupon I was afraid I was to miss you, barely caught the boat myself, and so did miss you. They told me at the embassy just now that you were here. And so I am here at last."

He accepted one of Gridley's cigarettes with a word of thanks, and settled himself on the impossible sofa in the corner of the sitting-room.

Gridley awaited the opening; it was a powerful one. The Brazilian slowly drew from his pocket a small, very flat package, which he unwrapped with tantalizing slowness. To Gridley he held out a photograph.

"Do you know that man?" he asked deliberately.

In almost any other emergency Gridley would have preserved a perfect control of his features, an impassive mask through which Marao could scarcely have penetrated; but now this inscrutability, all things considered, was too much. For a second his mask dropped from him.

It was merely a slight catch of the breath, a sudden tensing of the muscles of the hand that held the picture. But for Marao it had been enough.

"Ah! I see you do," he said with a smile of relief. "Who is he?"

His mind a whirl, but outwardly calm, Gridley handed back the photograph.

"I'm sorry—I can't tell you," he said slowly.

"Am I wrong then? You don't know him?"

Gridley hesitated.

"Yes," he admitted at length. "I know the man."

"Then who is he?"

Marao's tone denoted surprise and impatience.

"Precisely why do you want to know?"

"Because he is the man I must look to, I believe, for an account of my son. Surely, under the circumstances, you can't withold from me that information."

"Why do you connect your son's disappearance with this man?" asked Gridley quietly.

Marao's surprise grew momentarily.

"I fail to see, M. Gridley," he returned emphatically, "why you aren't willing—even glad—to give me the information I seek without beating about the bush so long. Perhaps you'll tell me this much: Was that man a member of Mrs. Marbury's house-party? For in spite of what you told our ambassador in New York my son was traced out there."

"He was not. Furthermore, M. Morao, I told your ambassador the literal truth: Your son, to my knowledge, did not enter the doors of Greencliff on the night of his disappearance."

Gridley met the piercing black eyes with equanimity.

"Then perhaps I have judged too hastily," Marao admitted after a pause. "Alfonso is known to have taken a late train out to—to the nearest station—I forget the name; and I concluded, since he sought Blanca, that he had gone at once to Greencliff. However, that is beside the point.

You assure me that this man was not a member of the house-party."

"No; he was not."

"Then what reasons have you for withholding his name?"

"Just now, very excellent reasons. Later on, perhaps—still, I make no promises."

Marao studied Gridley carefully for a moment.

"Listen, M. Gridley," he said at last. "I am not blind—nor yet a fool. I see you at the evident cost of great labor and many trials investigating what I assume to have happened at Greencliff that Friday night; yet you have never yet called in the police for their assistance, which, it seems to me, would be the most natural thing for an innocent man to do.

"I do not mean to say that you are yourself guilty; but I do believe you are shielding some one, and trying to work out justice through your own efforts."

"You are mistaken, M. Marao. I did call in the police. They found no evidence of crime, and so abandoned the case."

"Why then this mad chase of yours hither and thither?" Marao asked. "You are hardly the type of man, it seems to me, who would spend his time and energy on this thing merely for a pastime."

"There have been madder men."

"And I dare say," Marao went on, "that I know more about it at this present moment than you do."

"And I," returned Gridley, "know what you want to know. You accuse the prototype of that photograph of having had a hand in your son's catastrophe. No matter what that man may be to me I don't propose to betray him, subject him to needless suspicion, unless you can furnish pretty definite evidence of good ground for accusing him as you have done. Am I not right?"

"In other words, you would constitute yourself a court of justice to hear and pass upon my evidence—"

"Not entirely. I am a lawyer, I know the value of evidence, and, I hope, have some sense of justice. I don't care to disclose to you the identity of this man unless you can show that a certain amount of considerable suspicion attaches to him."

"And if so—"

"If you have a case I shall tell you the name of the man."

"Then listen."

Marao spoke hurriedly.

"For the past year my son has been intimate with a certain Parisian actress named La Fleurette, who is well known on the variety stage. The subject of that photograph was also one of her assiduous admirers, whom she and her circle knew as Mr. Paul Simonds, a rich American mine owner, of Denver, though subsequent investigation has proved that no such person is known in Denver.

"One night about six months ago a distressing incident took place in her apartment. My son, calling there unexpectedly, when she was away, caught the mysterious Simonds in the act of robbing the place, and attacked him. The police were summoned, but Mlle. Fleurette refused, for some reason, to lodge complaint, and the matter was hushed up. It was very odd, for Simonds, being evidently fabulously rich, could have had no ordinary motive for the depredation.

"Some time after that I began to notice that my son was mentally perturbed over something or other. And finally a month ago he left suddenly for America.

"The day after he went Mlle. Fleurette came to my house almost hysterical, and demanded to know where Alfonso was. I refused to tell her. Thereupon she accused him of having stolen from her apartment a dagger of some kind, which she treasured as a keepsake, though it was intrinsically worthless, she informed me. I communicated with him concerning it, and never received a reply.

"So then I conceived that there might be some connection between these events and his disappearance. I went myself to see Mlle. Fleurette and questioned her thoroughly. What information she gave me was both meager and incoherent. She did, however, insist that the American Simonds was the only person who could answer my questions; that it was to him I must look for the account of my son. And she gave me that small photograph of him as my only means of identification.

"That then is my case. Do you find the evidence strong enough against your friend?"

Gridley laughed harshly. "He's no friend of mine," he said. And then after a pause: "M. Marao, there is no longer any reason for keeping it from you; your son was murdered."

The Brazilian's poise was admirable; beyond a slight tensing of the facial muscles Gridley saw no signs of emotion.

"I am not surprised," said Marao at length. "I fail to see why you should have kept the secret so long."

"I had my reasons, as you may soon know—innocent, I may affirm. I have no idea who killed him—whether it was the man of that photograph or not."

"Undoubtedly it was he," exclaimed Marao, "from what La Fleurette told me. Who is he? Tell me! Why do you keep me in suspense?"

For an instant Gridley seemed to ponder, seemed to be nerving himself to some momentous decision. Then he spoke with deliberation:

"The man you want, M. Marao, is Sir George Tipton, of London."

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.

NEEDLECRAFT

BY W. E. NESOM

I LOVE a sempstress fair and sweet,
Whose name—if you must know—
In lieu of something more exact,
We'll call Miss Sew-and-Sew.

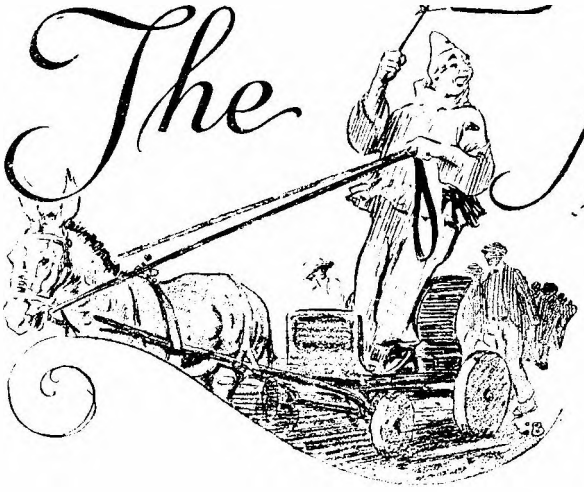
Whenas she plies her needle in
The firelight's mellow glow,
I much delight to see her thus—
I love to see her sew.

She's mine to cherish and protect,
And, as I often tell her,
Her life shall have no seamy side
As long as I'm her feller.

We talk of love when we're alone,
But when her ma and pa
Are present, she perforce must hem,
While I can only haw.

I feel convinced that she'd agree,
Did I persist to wheedle,
To thread the maze of life with me
As soon as thread a needle;

And yet my quiet-loving soul
With dubitation teems—
For while she seams domestic, she
May not be what she seams!



The Missus

by Izola Forrester

WHEN Matt joined the Big Allied Four, he left the "missus" behind in Bangor, Maine, for reasons. As he told the other head clown, Cluff Nolan:

"She ain't born to the business, Cluff. She's of real old down-east stock, you know, and her folks are against the idea of circuses: not to go to, but in the family."

Matt was rather proud of the family's objections, too, in his way. He liked circuses. He had been born under a tent, in a little one-ring affair through the southwest, and used in the parade as soon as he could stand the dust in his eyes. The occupation of clowning was hereditary in his family, and he loved it. Never such a thrill did Matt know as when he struck an entirely new town and was hailed by the throng of trailing children as a wonder and everlasting joy.

It was in just such a town that he had found Leila. Up back of Bangor it was, with a mill to keep it alive, and the beauty of the hills piled up behind it, and a whiff of the salt sea coming up when the wind was fair.

The parade was at ten that day, and Matt was having his usual fun at the tail end of it in his queer little donkey cart drawn by Dumb Bells, a gray atom of pure cussedness that Matt had inherited from his predecessor. With his feet planted against the front of the little cart, toy whip held high, and his white cap on the back of his head, Matt was living up to traditions when all at once he saw her—the future missus—standing on the steps of a quiet little house, staring at him as she stopped shaking rugs while the circus parade went by.

The world just opened like an Easter egg for Matt at that instant. Instead of a plain old ball of habit and custom, he discovered that it was full of treasures and magical promises.

The wind caught a strand of her yellow hair and blew it across her eyes. The strings of her pink gingham apron were all of a flutter, just like Matt's heart-strings, and her foot, as he saw it on the top step of the porch, looked absurdly small and pretty.

Now, how should he know that her small brother was one of the many kids running after him, or that the wave of her hand was for Charlie and not for him? He swung off his cap in answering salute, his whitened face eager and happy as he waved to her, and Leila promptly ran indoors at the sudden public tribute.

"That's my sister," Charlie said in excuse, coming boldly alongside the cart.

His sister? Matt swung him up beside him on the seat, and Charlie rode proudly there for several blocks down to the end of River Street, where the circus had taken up its quarters for a whole week on an acre of vacant land.

Matt slipped two "comps" into his hand at parting.

"Bring your sister with you, because she didn't see the parade very well," he said, and Charlie promised gladly.

Matt had his campaign all planned. That evening he saw her down in the first row, as he had managed it, lovelier than ever, and he played as he never had before. Once when he stood within hearing distance, he caught Charlie's voice telling her he was real good looking when all that white paint was off his face.

The show left Saturday night, to open in Clarke's Corners on Monday, and he stayed over to ripen his acquaintance with Charlie. After that he used to run back every week to spend Sunday in the little jay town, just for the chance of seeing her; and finally the family agreed to overlook his profession, and they were married, and she went back with him.

But somehow it didn't work right. He was sure Leila loved him. It was just that she couldn't get used to life under the canvas. The easy, happy-go-lucky familiarity of the circus family bothered her, and she grew lonesome for home.

So the second season, Matt left her there in the white house with the green porch where crimson ramblers climbed. He sent her money regularly; and when her letters grew few and far between, he tried to believe it was because he missed them on the split time the circus was doing.

He had several pictures of her, and used to sit before them in his corner of the dressing tent on a camp stool. They decorated the inside top of his trunk. It was a bureau trunk, anyway, which combined the conveniences of a trunk with dressing table and bureau.

"Who's the big-eyed kid?" one of the Boynton Brothers, acrobats, had asked him interestedly. "Some eyes!"

"That," replied Matt seriously and proudly—"that's the missus. I've got a home in Maine, little place about forty miles up from Bangor—Jericho Crossing, they call it. Ought to be Jordan, hadn't it? Why? Why, you green-eyed mutt, Jordan's in the Bible! Don't you know anything?"

Somehow, that home up in Maine gave him a standing and importance among the gipsying crowd of circus people. He was a family man, and acted like one. Crawford, the manager, who had known him for years, said he'd never known Matt to step so lightsomely and easily along the straight and narrow as he did that season. Every week his money-order went back to Jericho Crossing to Mrs. Matt Monroe. Whether she answered or not, it went just the same.

Even if there was a growing rift in the lute of their happiness, Matt thought that it could only be the old folks' and their opinion. He felt sure of Leila.

Often after the show was over and the other fellows formed into little groups for a quiet, social game, Matt would hunch himself on his camp stool to write his usual home letter. He never reproached her for negligence for not answering promptly, or told her about the troubles of the road. Instead, the letters were filled with plans of the coming winter. Just as soon as the show put up he would join her, and they would go South on a little trip together. She had never been South.

Matt's place of nativity was a certain corner lot in Texas, up near the Panhandle, and therefore he had felt a natural affiliation with the South, though his father hailed from County Sligo.

We'll take a boat down from Maine to Boston, hang around there for about a week, then go to New York. When you get tired of that burg, we'll take a boat around to New Orleans, and just jog along from there as we please until it's time to join the show in March. We've never had a real honeymoon, and I just want to show you I know how to make one happen.

Leila got the letter the next morning. The circus was playing in Massachusetts, and would make a jump the next week to Buffalo. After that the route was due west.

She felt that it was a favorable time to make the break with Matt. If ever there was a house-cat, devoted and addicted to its own familiar environment, it was the missus. She had been born right there in Jericho Crossing, in the front bedroom with the alcove. Nearly everything in the house furnishings was the same as it had been on that day.

The peacock-blue and crimson plush furniture in the parlor, consisting of four chairs, one standard rocker, and the "tête," hardly showed any signs of wear in all that time, so religiously had they been guarded from common usage. The black walnut table had an intricate inlaid top of diamond-shaped, butternut, maple, and oak. There was a legend in the family that it represented the master-craftsmanship of a certain Uncle Peter, cabinet-maker, and was cherished accordingly.

On the mantelpiece was a china silk drape edged with little pink chenille balls. There were several photographs in pink celluloid frames of family connections, which always stood on that mantel. There were two tall, pink vases at either end with little raised white figures on them, in imitation Wedgwood ware.

On a candle-stand in the corner stood a ponderous, brass-clasped family Bible. Leila's mother had purchased it with a ten-dollar gold-piece given her as a wedding present by her grandfather. As far back as the girl could remember the same tidy had lain on top of the Bible, a seven-sectioned pineapple pattern of hand-crochet made by Aunt Lidy just before she died.

It formed a fitting base for a slender, silver-gilt vase filled with pampas grass.

The only incongruous thing in the whole room was a plain, oval, solid silver picture frame on the little inlaid center table. From it there smiled perpetually the genial, happy face of Matt.

Leila's mother always spoke of it to callers with a certain deprecating tolerance. "He sent it to her for her birthday, so she felt she had to put it in here."

Matt probably had never dreamed that it would ever stand in that chilled sanctuary of family traditions. The crayon portraits on the wall of Grandmaw and Grandpaw Widdicomb looked down on him reprovingly. Had they known that any king of the sawdust ring would win the affections of a Widdicomb, they would have turned over in their graves.

It was Leila's duty to dust the parlor every Saturday morning while her mother did the baking. Lately she had left the inlaid table until the last, avoiding the eyes, whose gaze seemed to follow her around. Several times as she dusted it tears fell on the glass, tears of pity, not so much for Matt as for herself and the pining away of love's young dream.

She did love Matt. He seemed so different from the lean, sluggish-blooded fellows indigenous to the soil of Jericho Crossing. It was quite as much the lure of the unknown that had drawn her to him, the charm of the adventurous life he led, as anything personal about Matt. Yet she loved him.

But every day she was made to feel more and more what a sin and disgrace that love was. What a self-indulgence her marriage had been to the detriment of all her family connections. The only thing that mitigated this, in the eyes of that family, was the steady and regular arrival of the registered letter containing Matt's money-order.

It alone represented to them the outward and visible sign of any possible inward and spiritual grace there might be in Leila's marital tie.

The letter was handed to Cluff when Bat Saunders brought in the mail sack at nine. Matt was in the ring doing his tumbling act over the elephants. It was a good trick, and never failed to bring down the house. The Boynton Brothers did it first, making a run up a springboard and a double, and finally a double somersault over the backs of the huddled elephants. After them would come Matt, burlesquing the trick, and finally, at the last, sprawling on the backs of the elephants.

Just before he ran out of the entrance that night, the trainer warned him that Zaza was in an ugly mood. Some one had fed her wrong eats at the afternoon show, and her whole perspective on life was changed. She took her place in the middle of the group absent-mindedly, and her trunk swung slowly to and fro.

When Matt landed on her with his usual ungainly flop, she gave a sudden throaty trump and had him around the waist before even the trainer caught the lift of her trunk.

Even when the steel hook on the end of his pole hit her flank she never stopped,

but, uprearing on her hind quarters, she battered the clown against the center pole.

That night Cluff sat with his face in his hands in the waiting-room of the town hospital. Crawford came down the stairs to tell him that Matt was off the table and alive. That was all they could say for him.

"Hasn't he got a missus somewhere?" asked Crawford huskily. "Somebody ought to send her word. The doc says it's getting serious."

Cluff fished for the letter from his pocket. He knew the writing. He had given many a one to Matt, and had seen the quick grin of appreciation gladden his face. They were from her, all right. Didn't it say on the back, "Return to Mrs. Matt Monroe, Jericho Crossing, Maine, Box 72"? He went out under orders to wire the missus to come at once.

The telegram reached Leila the following morning. Promptly at eight the operator went home, and no messages were delivered at night. She stood with it open in her hands on the little sidewalk where the double hollyhocks grew. It was a perfect August morning. The world seemed fairly weighted with the joy of being, like a homing bee drunk with its own sweetness.

Unconsciously she began to untie her apron strings as she turned toward the kitchen door.

"But land o' rest, you ain't *goin'* to him, be you?" asked Mrs. Widdicomb helplessly, as she saw the look on Leila's face. "He ain't sent you the fare!"

"I've got the fare," she replied slowly, "and I'm going just as soon as I can get there. Tell paw to hitch up and take me down to the depot."

She caught the express at Bangor. All the way down she thought, not of the telegram, but of the letter she had sent to Matt two days before. What awful thing had he done after getting it? She sat in almost a stupor of remorse. Then would come a wave of hot resentment against Jericho Crossing and all that it had meant in her life.

She got into Reddington late in the afternoon, and asked the ticket-agent where the circus grounds were.

"They left this morning," he told her—"that is, the show. The clown, he got pretty nigh killed, you know. Elephant stepped on him or something. He's up at the hospital."

She got into the little station bus and told the driver to take her up to the hospital. Once or twice he glanced over his shoulder at her curiously. She sat forward on the seat, nervously clasping and unclasping her hand-bag, the tears falling slowly and silently from her eyes. Probably she was some relation to the clown, he thought sympathetically, and tipped his hat to her with unwonted courtesy as she handed him his quarter at the steps of the hospital.

Cluff was just coming out of the office when he saw her standing in the corridor irresolutely. He knew her face at once from the pictures in Matt's trunk, and went toward her eagerly.

"I was just leaving to join the show," he told her. "Excuse me, but I'm Matt's friend and pal, Cluff Nolan. I knew you was the missus right away from his pictures of you. They say he's out of danger, but it's going to be a long, long way to Tipperary. A mighty long time before he walks without crutches. Crawford's done the square thing by him in money, so you're all right." He gripped her hand with a heartfelt sympathy and looked at his watch. "Gee!" he grinned. "There's that letter! If it hadn't been for the address on the back you wrote, I wouldn't have known where to wire you."

She took the letter from him, her lips parting in amazement.

"Hasn't—hasn't Matt read it?"

"Couldn't. Didn't come out of the anesthetic for hours, and he's been too weak since. Good-by, and good luck."

Leila walked down the corridor to the elevator and asked for Mr. Monroe's room. She tore open the envelope and glanced at the letter. It was so brief, so cold-blooded, only a girl with New England's ice in her system could have produced it.

She tore it up in small pieces and hid them in her hand-bag as the nurse opened the door of his room and left them together.

"Sixty-Three West--"

by W. T. Nichols

Author of "Apaches of the Sea," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD.

TOM CLYDE, a dilettante stamp collector, was taken one day by his friend, Harry Andrews, to see an old sea captain, Abel Hubbard, of the tramp steamer, Zoar Hill. For some reason not clear to Tom the captain seemed annoyed at his interest in a stamp which Hubbard had, and still more so when, after taking a telephone call for the captain, he was able to make out only the words "Sixty-Three West—"

However, when the captain invited him aboard his ship he went innocently enough, only to find himself trapped in a dark part of the hold and shanghaied—why, he couldn't make out. He was released as soon as the ship was at sea, and in answer to his demands the captain replied that he "knew too much" and would have to make the voyage. He appealed to the captain's niece, Annie Worden, a beautiful girl, but she, too, treated him with suspicion.

A day or two out a stowaway was discovered and put to work in the stoke-hole, though apparently a man of education. Later on one of the seaman was mysteriously killed in the night. The stowaway was in the stoke-hole, so he could not have done it, but the captain suspecting a confederate questioned him closely, and finally beat him insensible. Tom then remembered that while confined in the hold he had heard tapping on the wall and a voice had called him "Louis." By this time he had almost succeeded in convincing Hubbard he was not a spy, so he told him of this incident. A search of the ship, however, failed to reveal the murderer.

A few nights later, while Miss Worden and Tom were on deck, he was stabbed in the arm by a man who suddenly appeared and then escaped. The wound was not serious, however, but another search of the ship failed to reveal the intruder. They did find among the effects of the other stowaway—Miller he called himself—a letter written in cipher, but all efforts to read it failed. A day or two later they rescued from a disabled yacht a party of wealthy New Yorkers. These proved to be Brayton Marcovale, multi-millionaire financier; his wife, her nephew, Ferd Sandwell, and a girl friend of the family's, Grace Lachine, who, it soon became evident, wanted to marry Ferd, in which ambition his aunt concurred.

Tom found also, with some dismay, that they were all friends of Miss Worden; that she was in fact Mrs. Marcovale's secretary, and that Sandwell was very much in love with her. In fact, he soon came to suspect—what was, indeed, the fact—that the meeting in mid-ocean and the "accident" to the yacht were neither of them accidents. This theory was soon proved. The night of the newcomer's arrival, while Tom was doing guard duty on deck, Ferd and Annie paused near him, and from their conversation he learned that Annie had taken the sea voyage on purpose to have time alone to make up her mind if she loved Ferd, and that he had traced her and followed.

While they were talking a sudden disturbance arose forward: one of the men hurrying forward had stumbled over a slinking form, and when Tom arrived they were fighting desperately on the deck.

CHAPTER XIX.

LOUIS MAKES HIS STAND.

DOWN the ladder dived old Hubbard, with a couple of his sailors following him. I was next. It was an instinctive performance, so far as I was concerned—this joining in the man-hunt—and deserving, I dare say, neither great praise nor blame.

Marcovale did not join the procession. Still, that was hardly his fault; for at the report of the pistol his wife had cast herself upon him, and was clinging to him, while

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she wildly demanded that he take her away from this awful ship, and save her from the murderers, and himself keep safely out of harm's way. The younger women behaved far more coolly. Both of them had uttered startled exclamations, and both drew nearer to the cabin wall; but neither lost her head. As for Sandwell, I fancied there was a shade of over-readiness in his manner, when he drew aside to permit me to pass; but I can't deny that he was at my heels, when I reached the main deck.

Here something like a game of hide-and-seek was being played, if one may term play that which is done in deadly earnest. The deck, as has been said, was crowded with obstacles, winches, a donkey-engine, hatches, and I know not what else of marine gear, all serving more or less as cover for the quarry. In the darkness the hunted might have escaped the hunters, had not the sailor, who had involuntarily grappled with him, been able to point out to the captain the exact direction in which the stranger had darted, after shaking him off and after firing that fateful shot. It was meant, no doubt, to halt the one pursuer close at hand, but it served to bring the others crowding to the chase.

My guess as to why the long sought stowaway had ventured into a perilous neighborhood was probably as near the truth as any other. It was that the fellow, from some post of observation, became aware of the stir and tumult beside the cabin, and suspecting that Miller was figuring unhappily therein, crept close with intention of observing the plight of his ally, and perhaps of attempting rescue, if Miller were faring too badly. So far, as you will recall, he had carried off the honors in his contests with the Zoar Hill's skipper and crew, and it may be he had grown careless. However that may be, the fact that he had risked too much was evident.

Old Hubbard stormed into the treacherous shadows like an infuriated bear, growling as he pounded along and asking nothing better than the chance to come to grips with the enemy. He had a pistol with him, as I knew, but he made no attempt to use it. The fugitive, too, was saving his fire. Nimbly dodging the bulky skipper, he sprang upon a hatch cover; struck viciously at a sailor who tried to close in with him; leaped to the deck, and bolted forward, steering, as it happened, straight for Sandwell. It was the dashing youth's golden opportunity for glory; but he was not quite equal to the test. He gave ground, just as, a little before, he had yielded me a clear road; and thought he aimed a blow at the flying form, it fell short of its mark.

The man swerved sharply to the right, to avoid a brace of sailors, and hurled himself at me; neatly dodged the sweep of my clubbed pistol—frankly, I had more faith in this use of the weapon than in my marksmanship; headed about, and ran aft, easily outstripping both myself and the first officer, who had come on the scene. Old Hubbard tried to cut him off, and failed by a dozen feet. The fellow seemed to have the speed of a greyhound and the skill of a fox in swift twists and turns.

Now it was shown that his dash forward had been with a purpose. It had checked the rush of his pursuers, had thrown them into confusion; had enabled him to secure a good lead in his retreat for the refuge where he meant to make his last stand. Here, too, luck was briefly with him. Old Hubbard and the mate crashed together, and pitched to the deck. Before they had regained their feet, the man was at the door of the little house aft the mainmast. There he halted long enough to blaze away with his revolver. Where the bullet went I don't know. There was a spit of flame, a sharp detonation. Then the dim form had vanished into the boxlike house, and the door had closed behind him.

Old Hubbard bellowed a demand for surrender, as we drew close to the house.

The reply was another shot, the enemy firing from one of the bull's-eyes. Whether it was fact or imagination I shall never know, but I would have taken oath that the bullet whizzed within a foot of my head. Down behind a windlass I dropped, and aiming at the little, round window, pressed trigger. The mate, flat on his belly at my right was firing at the same target. Beyond him Sandwell had found cover and was shooting so rapidly that I was sure he had an automatic. So he carried a gun,

eh? I made mental note of the circumstance, even as I aimed again at the bull's-eye.

For a moment or two there was noise enough as you may imagine; for not only was the man in the house replying to the bombardment, but on the cabin deck Mrs. Marcovale was well nigh in hysterics, and was screaming madly. Behind me somebody—one of the sailors, I felt sure—was groaning and calling out that he had been hit. So far he appeared to be the only one of the attacking party wounded.

Old Hubbard was no admirer of long-distance fighting and shooting at random. Up to the door he rushed, and threw his weight against it. It resisted the assault—and the first officer, who had sprung up and hurried to his commander's support, dragged the captain back just as the man within fired through the panels.

Another bullet followed the first through the door. Then half a dozen tore through the wood in the opposite direction, both captain and mate riddling the door.

There was no response to the fusillade. Old Hubbard broke from the mate's hold and turned himself into a battering ram. The door gave a little; another mighty shove and it fell inward, the skipper pitching over it and into the house.

The first officer was hard after him, but the battle of the after-house was ended. Its defender lay dead on the floor, with a bullet through his heart.

They brought out the body, presently, the captain at the head and the mate at the feet. They laid it on the deck, and about it gathered a silent group. A sailor fetched a lantern, and Hubbard bent over the body.

"Hit three times," he told us. "Left shoulder, left forearm, and the spot that did the business. Game fight he put up, at that! Well, just as well for him he did, and it came out this way. He'd 'a' swung for killin' Murphy, if we'd bagged him alive. He knew that, I reckon—now, look him over, all of ye! Anybody know who he was or what he was?"

For a moment no one spoke. The body, stretched on the planks at our feet, was that of a man of thirty or thereabout; muscular rather than heavily built. It was clad in shirt and trousers, rough and coarse and showing marks of hard wear. There was that, though, about the face to suggest that the man might have been no mere private in the ranks of adventure. The forehead was good; the features were regular. But you are not to understand that, as he lay there, he presented a picture of the calm majesty of death. He had died fighting. The lips, bristling with a week's growth of fair beard, were curled back from the teeth, which glistened savagely.

The mate broke the silence. "Never clapped eyes on him, sir," he said. "Nor me." "Nor me, sir." So it went, as the men gave testimony.

Old Hubbard hesitated briefly. Then he gave a gruff order. A seaman hurried off, and returned, presently, accompanied by Mack, the engineer, and the stowaway, Miller. Meanwhile, Marcovale, surrendering his wife to the care of her maid and friends, had joined the group. He took post close by Sandwell, and silently awaited events.

As Mack and his prisoner came up, the captain shifted the lantern till its beams fell full on the dead man's face. Mack thrust Miller forward until he was close to the body. Then old Hubbard spoke, very gravely.

"You don't need to be told what's happened, Miller," he said. "You can see for yourself. And you can see your game's up. It hain't done no good, and it's cost two men—good men—their lives. Yes, I'll say that for this fellow here: he made a good fight. And Murphy was a good man—none better on this ship. But the thing's done, and can't be undone. And now—got anything to say for yourself, have ye?"

Under the grime Miller had paled, I think, but he answered very steadily.

"Not one word, captain."

"Don't be too consarned sure about that!" Old Hubbard said, more persuasively than threateningly. "And, mebbe, there's something you can say about him, ain't there?"

Miller folded his arms; his eyes were noncommitally fixed on the face of the dead man.

"You've succeeded in doing away with him," he said. "You should be satisfied."

"Satisfied with killin' a sneakin' spy that murdered one o' my best hands and done his best to wreck my ship?"

Miller shrugged his shoulders. "At any rate, you've exacted what is sometimes called the ultimate penalty."

Old Hubbard kept his temper. "We'll let that pass. But you're one against twenty—might as well remember that! And, rememberin', mebbe you'll feel more like openin' up. Now this chap was called Louis, wasn't he?"

"Sometimes."

"Go on! What was the rest of the name?"

Miller shifted his position very slightly; his arms dropped to his sides.

"Captain, you ask much—more than you may realize. But, as you say, the odds are against me—hopelessly. But"—he seemed to hesitate—"but what may be for your ears is certainly not for the ears of all these men."

"Will you tell me, then?"

Miller's eyes shifted to the captain. "You alone," he said coolly.

Old Hubbard waved us back; he took a step toward the stowaway. As he did so, Miller's arm shot out. His hand closed on the hilt of a sheath knife in the belt of a sailor, who was passing him. In an instant more he had sprung at the skipper, and was aiming the knife at his breast.

But Abel Hubbard, master mariner and veteran of the Seven Seas, had had dealings before with desperate men. Those keen old eyes of his had missed not a motion of the other, quick though Miller had been. The captain threw up an arm, and stepped aside. The knife grazed his sleeve. Miller's foot caught in a coil of rope. He pitched forward upon his knees; staggered to his feet; and faced the leveled revolver of the captain.

"Throw down that knife!" Old Hubbard's voice rang sharply. "Drop it, or I'll blow a hole through ye, as you stand!"

There was a second in which Miller appeared to be about to yield. Then, with a cry, he raised his arm, hurled the knife at the captain's broad chest; and turning, ran to the side, and vaulting the rail, threw himself into the sea.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SECRET OF THE AFTER-HOUSE.

IT may not have been a case of returning good for evil, but old Hubbard did his best to save Miller.

He sang out orders; he infused somewhat of his own energy in his crew; and very speedily the sailors, under the first officer's eye, were lowering a boat, while the Zoar Hill drifted with idle engines. The hands worked well, with the willingness, if not the smartness of man-of-war men and presently the boat slapped the water, and rowed away, with the mate in charge.

Not till this was done would the old fellow give attention to the wound inflicted by Miller's flying knife.

"Oh! it's nothin' but a nick in the shoulder," he growled; and, fortunately, it proved to be little more. The keen point had penetrated coat and shirt, and gashed the flesh beneath. The hemorrhage was slight.

"I've seen love pats that did more harm," the skipper observed. "Course, 'twan't meant that way, but you've got to have the trick o' knife chuckin' to make it count. Miller meant bad enough, but he didn't quite know how. If he'd been a Portuguee, now—" There he paused, and shook his head.

"But what was he—or is he?" I asked.

"Call it 'was,' Clyde. He's done for. But as to what he was—well, I may have my own notions, but I dunno for sartain."

"Then you don't believe the boat 'll pick him up?"

"Not him!" We were a little apart from the others, but old Hubbard glanced about him, and lowered his voice. "When Miller saw his pal Louis had cashed in, he knew the job the pair of 'em had been set to do was queered for keeps. And the folks they were workin' for 'll stand for anything else, but not for excuses. He didn't want to go back and tell 'em how he'd fallen down. That's about all there was to it. Louis havin' gone out fightin',

Miller tried to match the play. When it come to the last move, he took his choice. Some people 'd rather have a bullet or two; others mebbe, vote for drownin'—jest a question o' taste, as you might say."

"Still, I don't fully understand—" I began.

That slight deafness of the skipper could be a convenience as well as an annoyance. Seemingly, he failed to hear, and walked over to the rail, to peer into the darkness, where the boat was searching.

It was fully half an hour before the first officer gave up his vain efforts to find Miller, and rowed back to the ship. Meanwhile, Marcovale and Sandwell had rejoined the women in the cabin; and the captain had made a sort of inventory of the results of the battle of the after-house. But one man had suffered from Louis's fire, and his hurt was not serious, being no worse than a clean flesh wound in the right calf. Hubbard patched him up after a fashion, and he limped forward, with an arm over the shoulder of another of the crew.

When the boat had been hoisted, and the screw was revolving again, Hubbard came up to me.

"I'm goin' to poke about in that critter's nest," he told me. "You can lend a hand, if you want to."

"Gladly!" said I. "By the way, though—have you—er—er—gone through his clothes?"

"Right you be! That's the first job to be done," he agreed; and we crossed to the spot where the body still lay.

There were no papers in Louis's pockets; nor could we discover an identifying mark on the garments. Under his shirt was a money-belt, in which were stored a number of gold coins. Hubbard held it close to the lantern.

"All eagles and double eagles—American money, but good anywhere," he commented. "And let's see! Eight times twenty's a hundred and sixty, and twelve times ten—say, pretty well heeled, wan't he, for a fellow that wouldn't pay fare—umph! Wonder how much more he distributed in tips on board this packet."

"Then you suspect—"

"I've suspected all along," he said testily. "But suspectin' and bein' sure ain't even first cousins. And lately one—two things—"

There he broke off; and resumed the search of the dead man's pockets. It brought to light a handful of cartridges, a ring on which were strung half a dozen keys and curious little tools which might be useful in picking locks, a knife, and, finally, a steel contrivance, very compact and to my eye rather complicated. This bit of mechanism Hubbard regarded admiringly.

"With this joker," he remarked, "a fellow oughtn't to have much difficulty in gettin' 'most anywhere he wanted to go. Jest what is it? Some patent burglar contraption, I reckon—jimmy—something like o' that. But now, havin' got light on how he squirmed about so easy, let's see where he squirmed from."

At first the interior of the little deck-house appeared to offer few opportunities for concealment. On one side was a heap of ship's stores, small stuff mostly. On the other were two large packing cases, seven or eight feet long and about two feet high, one placed atop the other.

Hubbard began to pry away at the side of the upper box; but the boards gave no sign of having been tampered with.

"Beats my time!" he ejaculated. "Told you I've been through this place over and over and never found nothing, and yet we know he hung out here. Of all the dum blind mysteries this is the plumb blindest!"

"Try the under box," I suggested.

"Have tried it!" he growled.

I tapped the side of the under case.

"Gives back a hollow sound," said I.

"Does, eh? That's funny, Clyde. Didn't notice it myself; but the edge is kind o' worn off my hearin'."

Again I struck the board. Hubbard, bending low, listened intently.

"'Tis a queer sound. But that case was packed full—odds and ends, light stuff, Yankee notions, you know, for tradin' with the colored brethren, mebbe."

I pulled at one end of the box, but without result. The skipper wrenched at the other.

"Fast as an iced-in whaler!" he grumbled—and tugged harder than ever.

Of a sudden, part of the board—a section three feet long—yielded to the pull. It swung outward, as if hinged, leaving an opening through which an active man would have no trouble in crawling. Hubbard poked head and shoulders into the box, and called excitedly for the lantern. For several minutes I could hear him rummaging about and growling as he worked. Then he drew back, and breathed the freer air of the house as if he liked it.

"See for yourself!" he said curtly.

I took the place he vacated. If the big box had been packed full in the beginning, it was almost empty now. At one end was a coat, rolled up as if to serve as a pillow. Near it lay a cheap cap such as laborers wear. Beyond these was a canteen, its stopper out and its interior seemingly as dry as a bone. Next was an electric searchlight, small enough to slip in a pocket. Then there was a ham bone, gnawed clean. I took a look at the fastenings of the swinging board, and saw that a sort of hinge had been made from a wide leather strap. Plainly a deal of ingenuity had been exercised by the stowaway.

I backed out and faced old Hubbard.

"Well," I said, "what do you make of it?"

"What I said before: it plumb beats my time."

"Lot of work done in there," I suggested.

He swore under his breath. "Yes, and before we sailed! It's a reg'lar plant—and done under my nose, at that! This case was loaded a full week before we got away. I know what was in it, when it came aboard; but I'll bet my last dollar it had been cleaned out before we cast off. Now who done that job?"

I shook my head. "I pass."

"And I've pretty nigh got to," he groaned. "Look ye, Clyde! While we were tied up at the pier, I was ashore more or less—had to be. But there was always somebody left to see to things. And there was reason why it should be a special wide-awake watch. Yet somebody sneaks in, and digs this hole like a woodchuck back of a barn, while the dog's barkin' at teams in the road. And it's all ready for this Louis to move in and take possession, and my goods carted out, by thunder! And when we catch Miller, Louis gives us the slip and takes earth."

"So?" said I.

Old Hubbard meditated briefly. "He took earth, and he was more or less provided for," he went on. "He had his outfit—the gun and tools—but he wasn't full stocked with grub and water. He laid in some—you mind that pantry-raid, eh?"

"I remember it."

"Well, he couldn't make another. We had him blockaded too close. So lately he's been on short rations. Saw what he done to that bone, didn't ye?"

"I saw."

Again old Hubbard hesitated. "Well, there's one good side to it—for us. It means none of the hands was in cahoots with him, and passin' along his victuals. And when you've got to deal with snakes, it's a heap better not to have 'em in the house, even if they're crawlin' around outside over your place."

"Captain," I said slowly; "Captain, I've heard you through, but I'm blessed if I quite understand the combinations. There has been a lot of machinery used in this business. What's the reason? What's the cause of all the scheming and planning? Why should it pay anybody to harass you with spies and desperadoes? Maybe I've a glimmer of an idea, but—well, if you're ready for a full show-down, I am."

Hubbard tugged at his beard. "Well, I dunno—" he began.

"I've waited a good while," I urged.

Possibly it was a tactical error to press him. He gazed at me for a moment, and there was a quaint twinkle in his eye.

"That's so, Clyde," he remarked dryly. "But you won't have to wait much longer, I hope, not to be told, but to see for yourself."

CHAPTER XXI.

MARCOVALE'S WATCH MEETING.

MARCOVALE and Sandwell were in the cabin. All the lights were going, and there were bottles and glasses on the table; while Dorin, bruised

of face but in fresh linen, hovered in attendance upon his master.

It was evident that both passengers had been drinking, and drinking freely, if not heavily. Not that either was drunk—it would have been unfair to suggest that they were not quite aware of what they were about: but Marcovale, sprawling in one of the swivel-chairs, was relaxed, a little dishevelled, and affable in most uncommon degree.

Sandwell, on the contrary, had shed all airiness of manner. He was sitting there, facing his companion across the table with the gravity of a judge.

At sight of me Marcovale sang out cheery greeting.

"Ho, my hold buccaneer, what ho? What's the latest bulletin from the front? You'll join us, of course! Dorin, look after Mr. Clyde, will you?"

The solemn servitor tiptoed up, and this time I didn't decline his good offices. Now that the strain of recent events was over, I felt a great willingness to join even this not too congenial company. Dorin treated me generously: I fancied there might be a trace of gratitude in his attentions.

"How!" quoth Marcovale and raised his glass.

"How!" I echoed.

Sandwell said nothing, and did not lift his glass from the table.

"What's the bulletin?" Marcovale repeated.

"All quiet along the line," I reported.

"Huh! Time it was!"

"Which reminds me—" said I. "What's the hour?"

Marcovale had his watch out in a twinkling.

"One forty-eight," said he.

I whistled. "The deuce! I'd no notion it was so late. You're making a long evening, aren't you?"

Marcovale had picked up his glass, but now he set it down with a bang.

"I'm making a night of it—a full night. Lord, man! but you don't think, do you, I've the marble calm to curl up in my little bed and dream pleasant dreams after the whirl we've had? I guess not! I'm going to keep awake and able to duck behind something, if anybody starts another Wild-West performance. Say! how many have been killed, to date?"

"Only two—and you know all about them."

He grinned wryly. "Oh, yes, I know—I know, that is, that it's demmed upsetting to have a batch of maniacs blazing away in the dark. Little old sunlight's good enough for me, my boy. And as for my wife — Great Scott, but another outbreak like that last one would finish her!"

"I regret that she was subjected to so trying an experience."

"Hang it! you can't regret it half as much as I do!" he said bluntly. "I'll never hear the last of it—how I dragged her off the yacht and into this floating rough-house."

"But you couldn't have foreseen—"

"You talk like a foo—a single man, I mean," he broke in. "Of course I couldn't, but I ought to—get the distinction? That's what I'm going to be up against till death do us part."

Clearly, this was not matter for argument.

"Still, I trust Mrs. Marcovale is rallying from the shock," said I courteously.

He took a long pull at his long drink. "Huh! She's turned in, and the maid's with her; so are Annie and Grace. Among them they may be able to quiet her down. Mind you, I ain't blaming her, though. Thought I had pretty good nerve, but I'll tell you, Clyde, this old Zoar Hill of yours is no rest-cure for a tired business man! And they talk about the soothing monotony of a sea voyage—oh, Lord!"

"Well, you'll soon be rid of us," I reminded him.

"Sure of that, are you?" asked Sandwell, breaking his silence. He spoke quietly enough and with a peculiar precision.

"To the best of my knowledge and belief," said I, "the captain fully expects to land you to-morrow—to-day, that is."

It was a remark in all good faith, but Marcovale frowned.

"Come now, Clyde," he snapped. "While you're preaching knowledge and belief, take on the real thing? What's at

the bottom of all this deviltry? There's something off-color with this boat. You're in the know. You're an insider. You've got the straight tip. Pass it along!"

"I'm unable to do so."

He changed his tune. "Confound it, man! We're all friends together. I'm trying to be decent to you, and you ought to reciprocate. And, I submit, there's something owed me. I'm paying good money—and a whole lot of it—and I'm entitled to know about the ship I'm trusting with the lives of my party, to say nothing of my own."

"I'll have to refer you to the captain."

He studied me for a moment with a keenness, which hinted that his brain was by no means fuddled, even if his tongue were loosened.

"Well, how about yourself?" he demanded. "Don't have to go to Hubbard, do I, to have the spot-light of publicity turned on your life and public and private services?"

"Oh, don't worry about me," I retorted; and got upon my feet.

Marcovale put out a hand. "Don't go! Have another with me! Ferd here is imagining himself a sphinx, and I want somebody around who can utter audible sounds now and then. If you've got a past or a present that's not designed for general view, all right. If you're out of your country for your country's good, you needn't sob out your sinful tale on my breast. If you and old Hardshell are running contraband cargo, or filibustering, or doing a Latin-American revolution on the side, good luck to you! Only don't go! Stay and talk to me, like a good Samaritan."

There was a touch of the genuine in the appeal. I paused, and was vacillating between yes and no, when the door at the end of the cabin opened and Grace Lachine entered.

Marcovale's face brightened. "Hurrah, Grace!" he called. "You're as welcome as the flowers in the spring or rain in the corn belt! Join our merry coterie. Get out that guitar of yours, and we'll while away the wee, sma' hours with song and revelry!"

She came toward us slowly, hesitatingly, with the most effective hint in the world of maidenly uncertainty in venturing at such an hour into a masculine assembly. She was still in her pretty dinner gown; but over her head she had draped a broad, filmy scarf, as artfully pleasing to the eye as a Spanish girl's mantilla. Sandwell gazed at her steadily, with unchanging expression; nor did he imitate the courtesy of Marcovale, who sprang up, and bowed her to a seat. As it chanced, her chair was next that by which I stood. The circumstance seemed to be most trivial, but, as you will see, it was to figure in a peculiar episode.

Marcovale was grinning at her amicably. "So you're on the list of the wakeful, eh, Grace? Well, so am I. Better take a bracer—I've found it helps. Dorin, do your duty!"

She shook her head. "Thanks, no! I don't need nerving up, Brayton. But if you've a cigarette—"

Perhaps the serving man was perfectly acquainted with her tastes. At any rate, he was proffering a tray before she could complete the sentence; and was striking a match while she made deliberate choice from the box the tray bore.

Miss Lachine smoked daintily, but with undisguised enjoyment. From the depths of the blue cloud, I fancied, she studied us briefly before she spoke.

"Brayton, are the horrors over? Are we to have any more examples of the simple life at sea?"

"Lord, no; not if I can help it!" said he. "But how's madam? Easier, I know, or she'd never have let you leave her."

"She's asleep, thank heaven!"

Marcovale nodded. "Then there's some good, after all, in carrying along a medicine chest. And the maid knows what 'll quiet her."

"Christine is very—capable." Miss Lachine paused very briefly before the last word.

Marcovale caught at it. "Capable? That's it. And let's be capable, too. Where's Annie? She's a good sort, when you're down in the mouth. We can't spare her from this watch-night party."

"She'll come presently. I imagine she's as wakeful as any of the rest."

"Then here's to her speedy arrival!" cried Marcovale, and snatched up his glass. This time Sandwell joined in drinking the toast, and I followed suit. Then I sat down, in the chair next to Miss Lachine's, mind you.

She was regarding us from narrowed eyes. "It's a bit unusual to make an unchaperoned night of it, but I own I'm tempted," she confessed.

"Bless you, I'll be chaperon!" chuckled Marcovale. "And this is our last night on the old Zoar Hill, anyway."

She glanced at me. "That is official, is it, Mr. Clyde?"

"So I understand," said I.

"That's right! Try your hand at extracting information from Clyde, the man of mystery," jeered Marcovale. "I've failed. Now you go to it!"

"Not I!" she laughed. "I'm quite unequal to cope with so trained a diplomat."

"Spare my blushes!" I begged.

Marcovale cocked his head on one side. "Huh! Didn't know a diplomat ever blushed. Thought they lost the knack from lack of practise. But here's somebody who can blush, thank the Lord! Welcome to our city, Annie!" And up he popped again as Miss Worden appeared in the doorway.

Swiftly her glance ran over the company; but with a jealous pang I realized that it rested a fraction of a second longer on Sandwell than on any of the others. Moreover, she proved the truth of Marcovale's words; for there was a delicately lovely flush in her cheek. Still, composedly enough, she permitted Marcovale to escort her to a seat.

Gone was Sandwell's immobility of countenance, which had matched Dorin's own. The fortunate youth was smiling; there was the gleam of triumph in his eyes, as they rested on a jewel which shone on Annie Worden's finger. Plainly, though it was not of inordinate size, it was a diamond of the first water, perfectly reflecting the light. She made no attempt either to display or conceal it; in either case it would have been pains wasted. Save possibly Marcovale, there was none of us who failed to grasp the truth that she was wearing Sandwell's ring.

CHAPTER XXII.

ONE GOOD TURN DESERVES ANOTHER.

LUCKILY, Marcovale was babbling briskly. What he may have been talking about, I don't know; but his volubility gave the rest of us time to rally from the shock of the discovery. And it was a shock, I am sure, to Miss Lachine as well as to myself. I heard the girl beside me draw in her breath sharply. Then, subconsciously, I was aware that she sat straighter in her chair; and I involuntarily took hint from her example. As for Sandwell, he may have suffered no shock, but most surely there was more than a trace of gratified relief, if not surprise, in his expression. He had been awaiting, and in uncertainty, the result of his plea; he had won—but he had feared lest he might lose!

Marcovale rambled on, as I say, and gave us precious time. Miss Worden responded bravely. No; she had had no word in private with her uncle; she could add nothing to the general understanding that we were to make port on the morrow; she was fully of opinion that she would greatly miss the Azuans, though she felt it but natural that they should be in haste to end so tragically eventful a voyage as the Zoar Hill was making.

There Miss Lachine broke in a little feverishly. Miss Worden was not to believe that anxious hearts would not follow the fortunes afloat of the lady of the Zoar Hill.

"Oh, yes—and of Mr. Clyde, of course!" she added. "How eagerly, dear, we shall wait for news of you—news of you and Mr. Clyde!"

"Thanks!" I murmured.

Sandwell's lips curled contemptuously, but he held his peace. But Marcovale made protest.

"Oh, let's cut the parting tear business till we come to it. Come, brace up, everybody! We've had enough of the other thing to-night. Grace, where's that music-

maker of yours? Play us something lively — that's a good fellow!"

To my amazement she turned to me. Her lips were smiling, but there was a challenge and not a friendly challenge — in her blue eyes.

"Do you vote with Mr. Marcovale?" she asked. "Are you in mood for ragtime after all that has happened?"

"Why not?" said I. "Pardon me, but — well, we can't turn back the clock you know."

"And you wouldn't even try if you could?"

"I don't know what I may do—might do, of course."

"Again the diplomat!" She said it lightly, but her eyes flashed scornfully. Then, with a manner of resolution, she rose.

"You shall have your concert," she told Marcovale.

"That's the ticket!" he exclaimed. "But let me send Dorin for the apparatus. Just tell him where it is, will you, and—"

"No; I'll do this errand for myself," she answered.

Marcovale looked after her admiringly. "Good sport, Grace, in her own way!" he said as much to himself as to us.

Unless I were greatly in error, the black-eyed maid had been hovering in the passage just outside the cabin, being, no doubt, as eager for the sound of the human voice as Marcovale himself. At any rate, as Miss Lachine swept out of the room, I had a glimpse of a slender figure scurrying away before her.

Marcovale lighted one of his black cigars and puffed luxuriously. In his own fashion he seemed to be deriving a fair share of amusement from the silence which had fallen upon his companions. The grin still lingered on his face, when Miss Lachine returned bearing her guitar.

She took her old place by me, but looked straight at Marcovale, who was half hidden in a cloud of his own making.

"It is yours to command, your excellency!" she said. "What may your gracious pleasure be?"

He waved a careless hand. "Anything —so long as it's lively."

She began to play softly an air I didn't identify, a pretty thing, but scarcely merry. Marcovale gave a groan.

"Lord, don't, Grace! I can't stand that creepy stuff—not to-night anyway. I can raise all the cold chills and gooseflesh that's good for me without that anguished soul wailing."

She struck into a livelier air; faltered; broke down. The guitar slipped from her hand.

"I—I can't! It was all too ghastly! I —I can't play for you, Brayton!" she wailed.

Marcovale stared at her. "What the deuce— Grace, I didn't dream you were so upset by that shooting! I'd have banked on your nerve anywhere and everywhere."

She swayed toward me; caught my arm. "Mr. Clyde, I—I—this room's suffocating. I thought I was case-hardened to smoke, but Brayton's cigar's too much for me."

"Permit me!" said I, and led her to the door opening on the deck. Marcovale, too, would have hurried to assist her, but she sent him back.

"It's nothing but a moment's faintness," she told him. "Open air will quickly cure it. I—I'm ashamed of myself for being such a nuisance. But Mr. Clyde, I'm sure will be good enough to look after me."

"Delighted!" I assured her. "Now, shall I find you a deck chair?"

But she clung to my arm. "I'd rather walk, if you will. I'm already much better. It was merely an overdose of those horrible cigars of Mr. Marcovale's."

We took a turn aft and came back. Her faintness seemed to have passed and her hand now barely touched my sleeves. Abreast the cabin door I was about to wheel, but she stopped me.

"That will do, Mr. Clyde," she said coolly. "And, on the whole, it was cleverly done, I think. You and I have excused ourselves rather neatly, and now we can enjoy a little undisturbed conversation."

"Count me at your service," said I, a deal puzzled as to what might be in the wind.

"The other night," she said, "you chose to fence. I warned you that you were making a mistake, and that you were not

wise to force me to be your enemy instead of your ally."

"I regret that you wished to be hostile."

"Then why compel me to be hostile?"

"Pardon me, but I don't plead guilty to the compulsion."

She stamped her foot. "You're wasting time, Mr. Clyde. So am I, until I ask you plainly and directly, if you, after what you have seen to-night, are ready to make common cause with me?"

"I have seen a number of things to-night," I reminded her.

"The one thing that matters to either of us, is the new ring Annie Worden is wearing."

"It's a very pretty ring," said I.

"And it tells a pretty story?" Her voice rose a trifle. "I should call it the prettiest story imaginable—if only you, and not Ferd Sandwell, had given her the ring."

"There's something to be said for such a revised version."

"Then," she said crisply, "have you the courage to join me in making a revision?"

"How is that possible?"

"Will you put yourself in my hands?"

"They are beautiful hands," said I. "It would be a pleasure, but—"

"But you refuse?"

"Lacking more information, I fear I must."

"Lacking your pledge, I can say no more."

"It's another deadlock," said I. "Unhappily, you and I are fated to meet them."

For a moment she was silent. "Mr. Clyde," she said at last, "we could have brought about that revision—I'm sure of it. But you prefer to sacrifice yourself and me. I don't know on the altars of what gods of chivalry or fair play you propose to immolate us; but I tell you, frankly, they are not the gods Ferd Sandwell worships. And I do not intend to be a helpless victim. Alone I may not succeed, where with you I should not have failed. But, so far as I can, I'll match craft with craft. And meanwhile I may be able to make you very sorry that you have such inconvenient scruples. I gave you warning, remember, that I can be dangerous."

"If bright eyes slay," said I, "I'll admit my deadly peril."

"You're in a peril your own eyes are blind to. It may not be deadly, yet it will be most humiliating. But do me this justice; don't think it wholly outside my main purpose. By hurting you, I may help myself."

"Pray proceed!" I told her. Of what might be in her mind I had no inkling. She would hardly shoot me; there was no jeweled stiletto in her hair. We were alone upon the deck to be sure, and at a most unholy hour, but close at hand was the brilliantly lighted cabin with its wakeful company.

She had been standing very near me, so near that, dark as the night was, I could see the quickening rise and fall of her bosom. And then of a sudden, she sprang at me, catching my collar in a grip of surprising strength. Her voice rose in a high-pitched cry.

"How dare you! Don't! Don't! You're strangling me! Help! Help!"

The swiftness of the attack, the unexpectedness of it, the sheer audacity, made its success. I reeled before it and almost fell; regained balance; felt her relax her hold; saw her spring to the cabin door through which she tottered, moaning and clutching at the bosom of her dress. In dazed fashion I followed her to the door and looked in.

Marcovale had an arm round the stricken fair, and she was clinging to him as to a rescuer, while he glared over her shoulder at me in an astonishment almost as great as my own. Miss Worden was on her feet, but remained by the table, while Sandwell was advancing with a hand clapped to a hip-pocket. And in the farther doorway stood the maid, her big, black eyes, bigger than ever at the astonishing sight they beheld.

"What the devil's all this?" roared Marcovale. "What in Hades has broken loose now? What did he do to you, Grace? Strike you? Throttle you? What the—"

"My—my pearls—the pendant!" Miss Lachine was acting her part to the life; but she was actress enough to make every word clearly audible. "He—he robbed

me! He caught me by the—the throat, and choked me, and—and snatched the pendant! Look!" She freed Marcovale from her encircling arms, and pointed tragically to the torn lace of her gown. She had worked the trick neatly, as she staggered through the door; and now there was an eloquent rent in the flimsy material.

"What! That pearl pendant gone? And he got it?" There was that in the tone of the man of millions to warrant belief that the booty would have been worth the capture.

Out shot a tapering arm, and an accusing finger pointed. "Brayton, that man's a thief, a villain. Oh, my precious pearls, my precious pearls!"

Marcovale's eyes flashed, but he was not without experience in crises. "Well, he hasn't got far with the loot, anyway," he remarked to the company in general. Then he addressed me. "Got anything to say about this, you highwayman?"

I, too, had been striving to gather my wits. "I've several things to say," I answered. "The first is, that if your young friend Sandwell will kindly remove his hand from the butt of his gun, there'll be less chance of a mistaken 'hands up!' order starting trouble. I'm not bragging, but I'm heeled as well as he."

Round whipped Marcovale. "No foolishness, Ferd," he ordered. "I've had all the gun-play I want in a lifetime. And the fellow can't get away. Dorin, get the captain—quick!"

The wooden faced man went out by the rear door. Following him with my eye, I noted that the maid had disappeared.

Miss Lachine dropped into a chair. Her bosom was still heaving tumultuously, but the gaze she kept upon me was remarkably cool and collected.

"Anything more to say?" demanded Marcovale.

"Not till the captain comes," said I. A few minutes in which to prepare a defense for the ingenious charge brought against me wouldn't be wasted.

Old Hubbard bustled in actively enough, but his jaw sagged as he beheld the tableau we presented. Marcovale told him, curtly, the case for the prosecution. While Miss Lachine and I were alone on deck, I had attacked her, and torn a costly pearl pendant from her possession. Exhibit A, the lady in distress; exhibit B, the tear in the dress.

The captain tugged at his beard. Then he glanced at his niece.

"Annie, what do you make out of all this?"

"I don't know what to make of it," she said gravely.

He turned to me. "Holy Moses, Clyde! but you didn't go to lay hands on a woman?"

"I did not," I testified.

"Oh!" cried Miss Lachine, and put her fingers to her ears.

"Well, what happened?"

I told him the truth. I admit it did not sound like truth. No wonder his face lengthened.

"Searched him, have ye?" the old fellow asked Marcovale.

"Not yet. We were waiting for you."

"Umph! Ought to be done, of course—have to be, I 'spose. Only I'll say this, Mr. Marcovale, Clyde ain't struck me as that sort o' skunk."

Marcovale shrugged. "Possibly. But you can't expect us, can you, to accept any preposterous story of a delicate lady attacking a big brute like that?"

"Well, no," the captain admitted. "Still, if you was country-bred, you'd 'a' seen hen-pecked roosters." He grinned wryly at some vagrant recollection. "Still, again, folks ain't feathered. And as you was sayin'—"

"I'll say I don't attach so much importance to searching him as to locking him up, and then looking for the pearls," growled Marcovale. "Fact is, I don't expect to find 'em on him. That would be coarse work—for a professional."

"You mean a professional thief?"

"Just that! Can you swear he isn't one?"

"Why—why, I dunno's I can swear exactly, but—"

Marcovale seized his advantage. "But you know mighty little about him, eh? And you're not qualified as a character witness? Then suppose you act as judge!"

Old Hubbard shifted weight from one foot to the other. "Dummed if I like this business, Mr. Marcovale!" he complained. "I don't fuss about a scrap now and agin, and I've took chances with Lascars and Chinese; but this—this is diff'rent. 'Tain't reasonable that a chap like him 'd strike a woman like her. And as for robbin' her " He paused and again sought his niece's counsel. "Annie, how do you figger it out?"

"I think," she said evenly, "it is one person's word against another's."

"But a woman's against a man's!" Sandwell interposed meaningly.

The fortunate youth had touched the weak spot in my defense. There lay the strategic advantage which Miss Lachine had seized upon. With her keen sense of dramatic values she caught the cue, and began to sob heart-breakingly.

"And there's the lady's dress all ripped," the captain conceded. "Looks o' things is against him."

"Then arrest him!" Marcovale rapped out impatiently.

Old Hubbard took a step toward me; it was a reluctant step. I fell back a pace—and collided with Bain, the wireless operator who was entering the cabin.

My retreat thus checked, the captain must duly have taken me into custody, I suppose, had there not been an interruption. From the other end of the cabin the maid was advancing, light-footed, demure, the lashes drooping modestly over her black eyes. She went straight to Miss Lachine. There was something in her hand, which had the gleam of gold and the pale light of pearls.

"Please, ma'am, but here's your pendant," she said. "I found it just now, ma'am, on the floor near your door."

The looted lady could not stifle an exclamation. She shrank from the costly trinket; recovered herself; snatched at it eagerly. There was a fleeting, murderous glint in the glance she shot at the maid, but her tone was ecstatic.

"Christine, you treasure! Oh, my pearls, my darling pearls!" And she kissed the pendant with the prettiest and most moving devotion.

The maid curtsied neatly. "Yes, ma'am, and thank you, ma'am. And it must have caught on the door-jamb and dropped, ma'am," she murmured. Then, silent-footed and smiling, oh so slightly, she glided back whence she had come.

"Bread on the waters!" said I to myself; and thanked the lucky stars for those scattered crumbs.

It was Marcovale's turn to suffer from sagging jaw. He peered dubiously at Miss Lachine, who promptly remembered her ravaged gown, and clasped trembling hands upon her damaged finery. Marcovale saw, and pulled himself together.

"Well, we've got to nolle the robbery charge," he growled, "but there's still the assault. And that's bad enough! But, I say, captain!" He turned to old Hubbard, who had received a slip of paper from the wireless man, and was staring at it fixedly. "I say! What's in the wind now? Lord, but I'm getting a phethora of the unexpected!"

The skipper raised his head. "'Tain't altogether unexpected to me, anyhow. And it's provided for, right and proper, in that contract you and me signed. I ain't goin' to be able to take you folks into port quite on time. 'Member I stipulated about a previous engagement, don't ye? Well, it's ripened quicker'n I thought it would."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MAN MONEY COULDN'T BUY.

IT may not have been flattering to my notions of my importance, but it was undeniable: on the captain's announcement I lost the center of the stage. And with me retired that capable leading lady, Grace Lachine. Alleged ruffianism, without robbery, was of merely academic interest, compared with this rude upsetting of the plans of Marcovale, the man of great affairs. There was no more demand that I be put under arrest, but there was demand, hot and urgent, that the Zoar Hill hold to her course.

Old Hubbard shook his head stubbornly. "What's got to be is goin' to be. You had fair warnin' before we traded. I'm sorry

to disapp'int ye, but there ain't no other way."

I may have underestimated the strength of Marcovale's head, or, maybe, the surprise had the sobering effect of a bucket of cold water dashed in his face. At all events, it was a keenly businesslike person who confronted the skipper.

"What's all this, anyway?" Marcovale demanded. "Strike? You want more pay? Think you can squeeze a few more hundreds or thousands out of me?"

"No," said old Hubbard simply.

"Then why don't you carry out your contract like a man?"

"Because there was another contract before it."

"Nonsense! You can't spring any prior lien stuff on me."

"I ain't springin' it. I told you about it in the first place."

"The devil you did! You worked in a lot of patter about hazards of the sea and acts of the public enemy, but that was all part of your game. You had me where you wanted me, and you were holding me up to the queen's taste. And I came across, all right. Didn't squeal, did I? Took my medicine and grinned, didn't I?"

"You did."

"Now take yours! We'll cut out the rhetoric, and get down to brass tacks. I'm paying you to land me where I can get at a cable—and I'm paying your asking price. It's up to you to make good!"

For all his stubbornness, old Hubbard spoke mildly. "Mr. Marcovale, 'tain't what I hoped for, what I figgered on. I thought I had margin to spare. But I give you due notice that if the call come, I'd have to answer it. That's all sot down in plain English, and your name's to it as well as mine."

Marcovale drew a step nearer. That jaw of his was protruding belligerently enough.

"I don't care what rubbish we signed. It's money that talks. And if this is another hold-up—"

The captain raised a hand. "Avast there!" he said sternly. "You've no cause to make a crack like that. I'm no missionary laborin' for the sake of the labor. I'm after the dollars same's you be, though I ain't got your reach or grip. I like to be obligin', but I like it all the better when there's a profit in it. And I'm makin' enough off you, any way we fix it. I ain't askin' for a penny beyond the reduced price I get for landin' ye behind schedule."

Marcovale swore; then, with an effort, controlled his voice.

"Oh, I know you Yankees have got to dicker: it's in the blood. But at bottom you've hard sense enough. You know as well as I do that you've got me in a corner. You're shrewd enough to see that I'm not set on reaching a wire to send birthday messages back to the States. It's business with me, pure business. And it's big business. It can't wait. You know that. You're gambling on that."

"No, Mr. Marcovale, I ain't." Old Hubbard had dropped back into his manner of mildness. "If I was a free agent, I'd land ye jest as quick as the Lord 'd let me, and ask nothing better. But I'm a hired man, hired by somebody to be at his beck and call, hired long before I ever clapped eyes on ye. And I'm a loser by bein' hired. Don't think, do ye, I wouldn't like to have them dollars of yourn I'm lettin' slip through my fingers?"

Marcovale showed his teeth in an ugly grin. "Now we're coming down to cases!" he jeered. "Real way to cheer you is to hand over some more dollars that you'll take precious good care won't slip."

"That ain't so," said the captain heavily.

"Bosh! Name your new price!"

"There ain't none."

Marcovale made a sweeping gesture.

"Captain Hubbard, don't play me for a fool!" he stormed. "I realize you've got me by the nape of the neck. I'm responsible for these guests of mine and for my wife. I want to get them out of this infernal ship of yours without a minute's unnecessary delay. That's beside my business ashore, but it all helps along. Great Scott, man! do you think I'm going to my wife to tell her that we've got to stay on this floating abattoir indefinitely?"

"Mayn't be more'n an extra twenty-four hours."

"Twenty-four hells! It 'll be the same thing for Mrs. Marcovale!"

"I know, I know! And it's too dummed bad," Hubbard confessed ruefully.

"Too bad! Too bad!" mimicked Marcovale. "Of course it is! Mental suffering adds to your claim for damages, eh?"

"Not so," said the captain very patiently.

Marcovale shifted his attack. "Who's the other man, the holder of the prior lien? And what's his deal?"

"That's my affair." Old Hubbard said it crisply, but not offensively.

"You're not talking about it?"

"Nary word."

It has been mentioned that Marcovale was a student of human nature. I think he knew that he was beaten, yet was moved to a final effort.

"Captain, listen! Land me as you contracted, and I'll pay you double price. Do it by noon, and I'll add a thousand dollars. Don't worry—I'm good for it. And you can have all these people as witnesses, though you won't need 'em."

Old Hubbard's glance ranged the cabin and its occupants, Annie Worden, composed but observant; Grace Lachine, dry-eyed now and shrewdly alert; Sandwell, cynically amused. It came back to Marcovale, and rested on him steadily.

"I reckon," said the captain slowly; "I reckon, Mr. Marcovale, you're kinder used to buyin' folks. And I reckon you're used to gettin' them you wants—mostly. You've got more money than I ever dreamed of, without wakin' up, shiverin' in fear all the burglars in creation were climbin' in my window. I guess you could buy up the whole township where I hang up my hat when I'm to hum. All my life I've worked to get money, but I ain't got much together, though I've took some mighty long and unhealthy chances. Generally, though, I've got my pay for what I done.

"First and last, a good many men have bought my time, but there ain't never been nobody who bought me, body and soul, and made me break a fair bargain with another man. And I'm too old to learn new tricks now. I ain't preachin'; I ain't tryin' to put on airs. Mebbe I'm puttin' a tarnation too high price on my word; mebbe 'tain't worth it. But it's my price, and I'm standin' out for it, and you ain't got enough money, Mr. Marcovale, to pay my price and buy me. And that, I reckon, is about all I feel the spirit movin' me to remark on this occasion."

For a moment the old fellow awaited response from Marcovale, but there was none. Then, with a stiff little bow to his passengers, he turned and strode out upon the deck. Bain followed him. So did I. In view of all the circumstances, my presence would scarcely add to the harmony of the party.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WE SPEED PARTING GUESTS.

IT was a morning of the sort which lures tourists to tropic seas, a morning of azure skies flecked by white, high-riding clouds; of a steady, balmy breeze; of a brilliant blue expanse of shining waters. Over the starboard bow hung dim mountain peaks, which were rising fast; for, as was testified by the smoke pouring from her stack and the quickened blast of her engines, old Hubbard was driving the Zoar Hill.

Bright and cheery as the day was, however, I took little comfort in it. Truly, I seemed to have relapsed into the hermit state. The skipper kept to the bridge, and the Azuans clustered about Mrs. Marcovale, who reclined in a chair made comfortable by many pillows. On the whole, my ostracism was not to be wondered at; and it would not have concerned me in the least, had not Annie Worden been held so unrelentingly in the neighborhood of the great lady.

As it was, Sandwell had scarcely more chance than I for private speech with her; but he bore the deprivation with more philosophy than I quite understood. Indeed, he was by far the merriest of the group. Grace Lachine sulked patiently. Marcovale was as glum as an oyster. Annie Worden was in mood responsive, but not elated.

Between us and the land I sighted a sail, which grew presently into a small schooner, running in toward the islands. But just as

I made this out, there was a stir aft. The steward approached Marcovale, and delivered a message, at which the magnate sprang up, and hustled to the bridge. There he and Hubbard had their heads together for a little, after which the charterer came hurrying back to his party.

Instantly all was bustle. Mrs. Marcovale hopped out of her chair and her invalidism with amazing alacrity; Grace Lachine recovered her spirits; the black-eyed maid, summoned in haste, flew about like one distracted, snatching up pillows and wraps and odds and ends in a very fury of activity. Marcovale, too, marched off to his stateroom, and I caught a glimpse of Dorin moving swiftly about.

Sandwell alone of the yachting folk appeared to have abundant leisure, for he strolled around a corner of the house at little more than a snail's pace. And then Annie Worden, abandoned by the others, came up to me. She met my inquiring glance, and smiled in her friendliest fashion.

"The problem has been solved, we hope," she told me. "The captain thinks there's no doubt the sailing-vessel yonder will be glad to land Mr. Marcovale's party. And with this breeze there'll be no trouble in making a great saving of time."

I whipped about, and saw that our course had been changed, and that we were steering to head off the schooner.

"And Marcovale jumped at the chance, of course?" said I. "Good for him! And good for everybody else! Will you pardon me if I decline to shed a parting tear?"

She was serious in an instant. "Mr. Clyde, of course you know that not for a moment did I credit that wicked charge Grace Lachine made against you!"

"To tell the truth," said I, "there are others whose going will be still more grateful to me than Miss Lachine's."

In spite of herself her glance dropped to the ring on her finger.

"I liked the Zoar Hill very well as it was," I went on. "Its society, if small, was excellent. Additions didn't improve it."

"Would you have had us refuse them aid after their accident?"

"Have you a dictionary?"

"No! But why?" she asked in surprise.

"For a definition," said I. "There should be a meeting of the minds for intelligent discussion. Just what would you call an accident?"

Telltale blood crept into her cheek, but she held her tone even.

"An accident is something which happens, isn't it?"

"Happens, not occurs."

"Perhaps," she answered; and turning rather hastily, walked away.

Something made me look up at the bridge. Sandwell was leaning over the rail. He must have been watching us, but he was grinning in remarkably good humor.

The skipper proved to be a true prophet. The island droger, overhauled and hailed, was ready to strike a bargain. She looked a little craft and dingy, but good enough for a few hours' trip. There was a stir in the group of the Azuans surveying her from under the awning, which I set down to objections by Mrs. Marcovale to committing herself to so tiny a bark; and therefore it was with wonder that I saw the lady, tearful and agitated, submit almost meekly to the operation of making her secure in the chair which the captain had had rigged again, while the first officer awaited her in one of our boats.

As the time for their departure approached, the yacht's people had moved forward, while I had drifted aft. Friendly overtures had come from none of them, and I was not disposed to risk rebuffs. So I was standing, a mere spectator, at some distance from the Marcovale party, when there was sound of a very slight scuffle behind the house. Twisting my neck, I had a glimpse of the steward retreating, and a very clear view of the black-eyed maid, pressing close to the shelter of the wall, and beckoning under difficulties, her arms being full of her mistress's belongings.

I crossed to her at once. "Good-by," said I, "and all the luck to you that's going! If ever we meet again I won't forget the favor you did me."

Her eyes sparkled. "Oh, she's a bad one, sir. And I could see she was scheming and cooking up mischief, with her airs and graces and that cigarette of hers. And when she went for her guitar she didn't

quite close her door. And I looked through the crack and saw her on her knees before her shoe-bag. And when she raised all that fuss, and lied about you, sir—why, where do you suppose I found that pendant she's so set by?"

"Blessed if I can guess," said I.

"Tucked in the toe of a slipper!" cried the maid triumphantly.

I whistled softly. The black-eyed maid's lips seemed to be disposed to imitate the action of mine. Not that she whistled, nor yet that she pouted—indeed, the general effect was pleasing and oddly tempting.

"I only wish I could do something to show my gratitude now," said I. "But I'm stone-broke. And—"

"As if I wanted money, sir!" she murmured reproachfully. "You'd been good to me and—and—"

Those not quite pouting lips were very near mine as I bent toward her. And there was something not at all threatening in the big black eyes.

"Merely as a token of more substantial acknowledgment some time," said I, and kissed her with all the good will in the world.

Round the corner of the house she flashed in a twinkling, and darted forward by the other gangway. And in a moment more she was taking her place in the chair; and in another, swinging over the rail, squealing and kicking vivaciously to the vast entertainment of the assembled mariners.

Miss Lachine had followed Mrs. Marcovale into the boat. I caught her eye, and she frowned darkly, shifted position, and turned her back. Dorin, luggage-laden, was descending the ladder. At its top Marcovale, pausing, put out a hand to Sandwell, who shook it warmly.

I stared, perplexed, at the pair. What had happened? Why was the youth unburdened of a traveler's equipment? And then Marcovale called out something to old Hubbard, bowed low to Annie Worden, even nodded stiffly to me in my modest retirement, and began the descent, while Sandwell stepped to the rail and fell to chaffing the women in the boat.

The truth burst upon me. He was not to quit the Zoar Hill. I strode over to the skipper, who was superintending the lowering of the Marcovale trunks into a boat sent by the schooner. I laid hold upon his arm.

"What's all this?" I demanded. "That fellow staying?"

Old Hubbard peered at me. "Eh? What's that, Clyde? Oh, speakin' o' young Sandwell, was ye? Well, I swan! His folks hated to have him do it—'specially the old lady—but he's got a persuadin' way about him, and I guess I'd agreed to let him come along before I half-knowed what I was doin'. And now if you're goin' to be hystericky—"

"Leave me out of the count," I told him. "You've taken him as a passenger, have you?"

"Well, sort of. You see, I—er—er—it struck me he'd help out for company for Annie."

"Did she suggest it?"

"Lord, no! But he did. And so we kept it as kind of a surprise for her—and all the rest—till the very last. Then the old lady made the feathers fly, I tell ye, and the young un—say, I'll bet you, Clyde, she's full o' red pepper and tobasco sauce, if ever she lets herself go! But then you know what she is!"

"I do," said I grimly.

Sandwell, leaning far over the rail, was calling farewells to his friends in the boat. Annie Worden, too, was waving her handkerchief; but it occurred to me, with quaintly unreasoning satisfaction, that she had put a dozen feet of rail between herself and the fortunate and persuasive youth.

CHAPTER XXV.

WE KEEP AN ENGAGEMENT.

WE were four at dinner that day, but in some respects the meal was more formal than those which had been served to a larger company. The battle-scarred steward attended us in melancholy mood. He looked, if possible, more like a sheep than ever, not a lost sheep, but a sheep that has lost something; and his dolefulness was not hidden. However, the keynote of the dinner was not struck by any

chap in a white jacket, but by Annie Worden.

That young woman seemed to put each of her three companions on the defense, or at least on probation, so to speak. The captain, after an unhappy venture or two, took refuge in silence. I followed his example. Only Sandwell appeared to be immune to something very like a snubbing, and made talk, which was not especially wise nor yet witty; and which merely went to show that elation over his successful maneuver survived the chill of Miss Worden's manner.

I inferred that she was not pleased by his desertion of the Marcovales, flattering though she might have had reason to find it; and that the skipper was in her bad books, temporarily, as a not quite innocent accomplice. Why I should share in the general disapproval of the male sex was not clear, but share in it I did; and after dinner the girl took herself off, leaving Sandwell and myself to entertain each other.

We hit it off badly. He offered me a cigarette much as one holds up a bone for a dog to jump at. I declined it with equal politeness.

He grinned superciliously. "Might as well make the best of things," he counseled.

"And—er—er—by the way—didn't you drop into a tactical error?"

"I'll take my chances," said I dryly.

"Mistake, all the same! Marcovale might have given you a lift ashore."

"Possibly. But I prefer to be here."

His grin verged on insult. "There's such a thing as lagging superfluous."

"And there's such a thing as forcing one's self in where one isn't wanted," said I.

It was not a mutually annihilating exchange, but it sent Sandwell in one direction and me in another. He chose to lounge aft, and I watched a gang of men who were clearing away the hatch-cover forward. Old Hubbard supervised them for a time, then joined me. In spite of the chastening he had had at dinner, he was in good humor.

"Well, we're gettin' on, we're gettin' on, Clyde," he told me. "And we're gettin' close in—see?" He jerked a thumb at an island peak not more than four or five miles away. "In two-three hours you'll be seein' what 'll save you the need of askin' a lot of questions."

"It 'll suit me," said I.

"I'll be glad to have it over with. Good business, but risky. And with Annie along—" He paused briefly, and went on: "Course, if I'd known she was figgerin' on comin' this trip, I'd 'a' headed her off. She walked in on me, though, all ready to take off her bunnit and shawl and stay quite a spell on the old Zoar Hill. And, somehow, when she makes up her mind, she don't change easy. She's like her mother was—like her a lot."

"Your sister?" I inquired.

He nodded. "Only one I had. Fine girl she was, too—Annie's jest her picture. Died five years ago. Worden 'd died when Annie was a little girl—lawyer, he was, and a good one. So I'm about all the kin Annie's got left, and when she said she was goin' with me this v'ige—well, that settled it."

"Contracts or no contracts?"

He took out a cigar and lighted it. "Well, yes, you might put it so," said he. "Only my contract to look after Annie, if she wanted to be looked after, come first of all. But I put it to her plain and straight. If she wanted to ship herself along with a pile of the contrabandest kind o' war contraband, some few tons o' high explosives included, she was good and welcome. She didn't bat an eyelash. She took right holt. She helped me, and it was surprisin' how she could help. She's quick and keen, and she's got a head-piece with brains in it. And there was ways where she—say, though, you must 'a' got a line on that!" And he gave me a sidelong glance, which was half quizzical, half apologetic.

"Oh, I'm cherishing no grudges against her," said I. "But you're putting into words some things I couldn't help suspecting about the job you have on hand, you know."

He studied me for a moment. "Clyde, you're a queer fish, in your way. To begin with, you've kept me guessin'. One minute I'm ratin' you as knowin' altogether too much for your health, and the next I'm wonderin' if you ain't the footlessest cuss that ever had to wait for it to rain real

hard before he'd go in out of the wet. And then, no matter what happens, you seem to land on your feet. Annie thinks you're all right, genuine. As for me—well, at the start-off, I was worried to death, and suspicious of everybody. There'd been spotters after me, whenever I left the ship, and there was fellers hangin' around the pier that hadn't no business there.

"Then when I was all ready to go to sea, I caught that Miller tryin' to stow himself away aboard me. Top of it all, when I went to that saloon on the chance o' gettin' a final word from a certain party—it was kind of a rendyvoo for us—you walks in on me, and tells more'n you had any call to know about them papers, and springs that about hearin' 'Sixty-Three, West'—over a wire that don't say nothing to me—why, I allows to myself you'd better come along with me for safe-keepin'."

"Pray, don't stop," said I.

"So I shipped ye, and that ended that part of it. Then there was the Miller business and the trouble with that Louis. Ought to give ye a notion of the sort o' folks I was up against."

"Big leaguers?" I observed.

"Saw how they played the game, didn't ye?"

"I saw."

He thrust out his jaw a little. "All right. Now you're goin' to see how I play it!" he said curtly.

In truth, I had not long to wait. The Zoar Hill plowed along at her best pace. The loftier island was left behind. We drew in to a lower group, two rather small, the third much larger. All were well wooded.

As we opened the passage between the smaller islets, there was a shift of helm, and at half-speed old Hubbard felt his way into and through the strait. It was so narrow that one could clearly see the surf breaking on the windward side of the islandss, and a strong surf it appeared to be, for all the seeming gentleness of the swell. To leeward, though, the water was like a lake—and just where it was smoothest lay a cruiser, as lean and gaunt as the one of our earlier acquaintance, but not for an instant to be mistaken for her. In tonnage the two war-boats may not have been far apart, but this one was even higher and sharper of bow and with a more exaggerated curve of ram.

Not another craft was in sight. No sail showed in the roadstead: none gleamed in the sun to seaward. Along the shore there were no signs of habitations.

Evidently we were recognized and expected. Two or three of the cruiser's boats were dropped into the water, as the Zoar Hill cautiously crept up. Our forehatch was open, and from the depth of the hold the crew was hoisting barrels and packing-cases, some of which were exceedingly weighty. Two of the hands, also, were lowering one of our boats.

As the ship lost way, old Hubbard came down from the bridge.

"How's that, Clyde, for neat keepin' of a date?" he sang out. "Couldn't be no better. Daylight to work by, and night not too far off, if it comes to makin' a run for it. And for all their schemin' and deviltry they can't stop me from makin' delivery on time to the minute, by thunder!"

"But where are we?" I demanded. "What islands are those?"

He grinned. "Well, this ain't exactly a breach o' neutrality. It's more like playin' hob—in the other fellow's back yard. But you can look up the charts afterward. Just now I want you to do something else for me—you and young Sandwell. And that's to take Annie yonder—" he nodded at the girl, who had come on deck—"take her and pull off a little in our boat. There's some stuff to be transshipped that's mighty ticklish handlin'; and none o' you three is drawing profits or wages for riskin' being sent to Kingdom Come in little pieces. So don't stay too near, and yet don't get too far off—may have to call ye in mighty abrupt, you know. Better not land. And, by the way—pull an oar, can't ye?"

"After a fashion."

"That 'll do. It's like a pond in here, and Sandwell says he's an oarsman. And Annie bein' ready, you'd better start. No, she won't need no chair. We've put the ladder over, and she'll negotiate it. And now—for I'm in an amazin' hurry—"

I didn't need urging. I crossed to Miss Worden, whom Sandwell had joined.

"The gondola waits," said I. "What may be your ladyship's pleasure?"

"I believe," she said evenly, "it is the captain's pleasure that there be no delay."

There was a smile on Sandwell's face which I did not admire: it was too closely related to a smirk.

"Then permit me to exercise my right of command of the expedition," said he, and took her arm with a manner of proprietary authority I liked still less.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A STRAY SHOT SCORES.

PERHAPS a quarter-mile from the two ships we stopped rowing and let the boat drift.

Miss Worden had held the rudder lines, while we moved slowly away from the vessels, keeping about the same distance from the shore. Now her hands lay idly in her lap, while from under the broad brim of her sun-hat, she watched the boats plying between the Zoar Hill and the cruiser. The naval men were in haste, evidently, and old Hubbard was ably seconding their endeavors; and the ships having been brought as close to each other as safety permitted, the work of transferring freight was going on famously. One boat after another shot up to the Zoar Hill, took on its load, and glided away, the seamen bending their backs lustily. It was, indeed, a scene of liveliest activity in the midst of most tranquil surroundings. Our boat, rocking so gently, might have been a skiff in some sheltered cove of a north woods lake.

Sandwell had captured the post of honor at stroke. He lounged on his thwart, surveying complacently the girl who faced him, and paying little attention to the doings of the men-of-warsmen. As for me, I divided time impartially between scowling at his back, observation—not scowling—of Miss Worden over his shoulder, and contemplations of the shuttling small craft. There was little talk among us. In fact, the conditions were hardly such as to promote confidential remarks. I wondered a little what quaint strain of humor in the captain might have helped along the plan of safety first for his three passengers. Possibly the old fellow was taking time, now and then, to chuckle at thought of the boating party he had arranged, and of the general sociability likely to prevail.

Thus reminded of the captain, I sought to make him out on bridge or deck of the Zoar Hill, and so stumbled upon a discovery. Though we were not even paddling, the distance of the boat from the steamer certainly was increasing. A squint shoreward showed that we were drifting parallel to the beach; and by taking ranges on trees near the water, I satisfied myself that we were in a current, very moderate but quite steady. There was nothing to cause alarm. We were still well under the lee of the land, and pulling back would be merely a matter of a few extra minutes.

I don't know how long we thus drifted. Certainly, time enough slipped away to convince me that, though the girl wore Sandwell's ring, observation offered little to indicate that she had waived any of her mental reservations in putting on again the emblem of their understanding. Which was a conclusion of the sort to make me indifferent to the passage of the minutes, or the widening of the space between us and the Zoar Hill. And being thus indifferent, I had no warning of the sudden, sharp blast from the steamer's whistle.

Perhaps the others had been as self-absorbed. At all events, the three of us stared an instant blankly at freighter and war-ship. The cruiser's boats were pulling for her madly, and there was white water at her bow and stern.

Again old Hubbard blew his rasping signal, but as he did so, a fountain rose from the sea well off the cruiser's quarter. Then came to our ears a report, not loud but unmistakable. We whipped about to behold, rounding a promontory of the larger island, a lean, gray ship, from whose bow a thin wisp of smoke was drifting.

The war-boat nearer at hand had been

surprised, but not caught napping. There was a jet of flame from her side, and another and another: while she gathered headway, leaving behind one of her empty boats, dancing merrily on the waves kicked up by her screws. But the Zoar Hill, too, was moving, sluggishly in comparison, yet fast enough to show that old Hubbard knew that he might not linger to pick us up, if he was to escape the racing pursuer.

We were toiling for dear life, but the boat was heavy and blunt-nosed. No doubt, our most sensible plan would have been to head for the shore; but, instead, we rowed for the ship and rowed our hardest, while old Hubbard, sheering off from the course laid by his ally, steered for the passage by which he had entered the roadstead. Meanwhile both war-ships were blazing away with such guns as they could bring to bear, though as yet without damage to pursuer or pursued, so far as we observed. Their gunnery was far from wild, however; else, being fairly close to the line of fire, we might have fared badly. Still, as the chase drew away from the land, our danger lessened.

"Thank Heaven, we're out of range now!" thought I; but was fated to enjoy but brief encouragement.

The enemy, driving after the cruiser, and seeing that the Zoar Hill would escape by the narrow channel, pitched a shell in her direction, as a hint to heave to, I suppose. It was, probably, merely a minatory shot; for it missed her by an eighth of a mile. I had a glimpse of a column of water rising in the air, and almost instantly of another directly in line with us. Then a jarring shock ran through the boat. My oar-blade missed its grip. Over on my back I went, into the bottom of the boat—and into a torrent of water pouring through a gaping hole in the bow.

These things I remember with photographic distinctness. Then comes an interval of vague and confused impressions, clearing into discovery of being overboard, of swimming mechanically, of making out the boat, full of water and with its gunwale awash.

Annie Worden was clinging to the stern of the boat. I heard her give a cry, and then I saw Sandwell. He was some distance away—fifty yards or more, I think—and seemed to be keeping up without trouble. He, too, heard the cry, and for an instant hesitated. I could see him looking back. I even fancied that he was about to turn and come to the girl's aid. It was an instant, I believed, in which he fought a bitter battle with the fear which may grip a man in a crisis; fought and lost—and threw away, in craven panic, hope of that for which an hour before quite honestly he might have vowed he would gladly give his life.

Sandwell was striking out for the beach. I paddled to the boat; caught its gunwale; clawed a way aft until my weight threatened to sink the derelict too deeply by the stern.

"Can you swim?" I asked the girl.

"A little—not far enough, though." She was very pale, but she was keeping her head and her grit.

"Same case here," I told her. "But this wreck will keep us afloat for a while. I guess all the harm that can be done has been done."

The projectile had sheered away the cut-water and the planking for a foot back. Even then it struck me that the boat was not beyond repair, provided we could drift what was left of her ashore.

The Zoar Hill, well in the channel by this time, was pounding away at full speed. I did old Hubbard the justice to believe that he had no inkling of our plight, and that, having lost sight of the boat, he supposed it safely under the shelter of the island. If he had known our situation, he would not have deserted us, enemy or no enemy; but he was ignorant, and there was no way to enlighten him.

As for the pursuing war-ship, hot on the chase, she could have done nothing for us. Probably she passed much too far to seaward for her officers to make out a pair of bobbing heads. But if the swift cruiser did not see us, we saw her very plainly as she stormed along, great volumes of smoke pouring from her three tall and slender stacks.

"There's an old acquaintance," said I. "Remember the silent visitor that looked us over so thoroughly? What a lot of trouble she'd have saved herself, if she'd been a mite more inquisitive."

"And there's another ship coming," she warned me.

"Oh, a consort," I suggested.

The stranger, evidently a man-of-war, was just clearing the cape of the larger island. She seemed to be heading farther out than the leader; but I figured that her presence effectually disposed of any lingering chance of old Hubbard turning back to pick us up from an island refuge. We must do what we could for ourselves.

Sandwell was nearing the beach, but it was to be noted that if he had gone straight in, the current had carried us perceptibly nearer the passage between the small island and the larger.

"We can't stop at the first station," I said presently. "But there's a jut of land yonder—" and I pointed to the promontory. "And there's a drift that's taking us that way."

She understood, and nodded pluckily. "I'll do my best to obey orders. What are they?"

I tried to recall what I had heard or read of suggestions bearing upon a case like ours.

"Better slip off your shoes, if you can," I told her.

She gave a convulsive wriggle, and smiled faintly. "I've kicked them off—what shall I do next?"

"Give me your sympathy," said I, and took my turn at wriggling. The knots in the shoe-strings were stubborn, but finally yielded. I was puffing, but my feet felt relieved of a load.

Suddenly she spoke, with a sharp indrawing of her breath. "He—he's reached shore!"

I saw Sandwell stagger up the sloping sand, and drop as if exhausted.

"Well, I wouldn't change places with him!" said I shortly.

There was silence after that, a silence of several minutes. She broke it.

"We're moving all the time, but we're not getting nearer the shore."

It was true. I had noted the fact, and had been racking my wits for a remedy for the trouble.

"If only I had an oar--" I began.

"Can't we push the boat by swimming with it?"

I caught at the hope. "To be sure we can! Better yet, I may be able to do it alone. If you'll shift places, I'll turn myself into a propeller."

But she had a cleverer idea. Probably the undamaged stern would meet less resistance than the yawning bow. Besides, if one of us took station on each side of the boat, we could work together.

"Oh, regular side-wheeler!" I cried. "But don't overdo. We may have to swim for it in the end, you know."

"I understand," she assured me coolly.

We took our places, each with a hand resting on the gunwale, and began to swim. Luckily there was little difficulty in swerving the stern till it pointed in the desired direction, but it was easy to see that we made slight progress in forcing the water-logged boat landward. Perhaps it was well that we realized the task was so long and tedious, and so husbanded our strength.

Sandwell had got upon his feet, and was following us along the beach. From the end of the little island he called out to us, but neither made reply. The last I saw of him was when, half-way across to the larger island, I looked back. He was running along the beach, aimlessly, as I supposed, and in bewildered fashion. The girl did not look back. Of that I was sure, and the certainty nerved me to redoubled determination.

There was need of the spur. Between the islands the breeze had clear sweep; and though it was by no means strong, it stirred up little waves, not big enough to be heeded on a ship or to do more than rock a high-riding boat, but extremely awkward for swimmers in our predicament. In addition, while the current seemed to hold true, there was sufficient force in wind and wave to deflect our drift away from the land. It was not a very marked change, but where we had been gaining by inches, we could ill-afford to lose by feet.

There was nothing to do but to swing the boat's stern almost into the wind and fight to hold our own, while the current carried us along toward smoother water.

In this struggle, long, wearing and grim, the girl did her share and more. There was never plaint nor cry from her lips; but as we dragged slowly into the lee of the larger island, her efforts lessened, and she could do little more than cling to the side of the boat. We had contrived to cross the channel without grave loss in leeway, but the task had taken heavy toll. It was a question now, not of guiding the water-logged boat to the shallows, but of choosing the moment to abandon it and make a final effort to swim ashore.

For a time the curve of the beach seemed to favor us; then it became plain that the current was veering seaward, as if to clear the cape. I worked my way around the bow of the wreck and to within a few feet of my companion.

"Now!" I said hoarsely, "if you need to, rest a hand on my shoulder and—and don't try to hurry. Are you ready? Strike out!"

Weary as she was, there was not a second's faltering. As I overtook her, she caught my shoulder, taking care, though to impede my freedom of movement as little as might be. Nor was she a mere, helpless drag; for, with the true courage that knows no surrender, she did her best to aid in our progress.

Had we been fresh and unwearied, our task might not have been hard; but here was a struggle against the odds of strength almost spent. It was slow work, desperately, maddeningly slow. Gradually I felt the pressure on my shoulder increase, and knew that, for all her pluck, the girl was near utter exhaustion. My own limbs were like lead; my heart was pumping like an overtaxed engine. I seemed to be settling lower in the water. Tiny as the ripples were, they were breaking over my head. It was a fight for breath, for air to fill my straining lungs. I felt myself sinking; rallied all my energy; for a precious instant forced nostrils and mouth above the surface. Then I was sinking again. There was a blind, despairing struggle. And then out of despair came hope, thrilling, electric; as my foot struck the firm sands of a shoal.

That gradual slope to the narrow strip of open beach might have been a mountain-side for difficulty of ascent, as up it I toiled, half-leading, half-carrying my companion in the adventure. Reeling, stumbling, yet never quite falling, we gained dry land.

Of such a moment one may retain few clear and distinct impressions. Yet one stands out vividly in my mind. The girl's hand—the hand that had worn Sandwell's ring—was still clinging to my arm, but the ring had vanished. I fear I mingled a prayer of thankfulness for deliverance from peril with another of hope that the ring lay somewhere in the depths of the sea.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CASTAWAYS AND FUGITIVES.

FOOD and drink, and warmth and shelter may be most unromantic matters, but they stand at the forefront of human needs. It behooved me to consider them, so soon as I had regained breath and some portion of my wits; and to set about supplying them, when the first paralyzing effects of fatigue had passed. Our situation might be free of immediate peril, but it was sufficiently grievous. We were castaways on an island of which we knew nothing. Night was coming on. Our clothes were soaked and dripping. Plainly, there was work to be done, and done at once.

Luckily, the metal match-safe I carried was water-tight. Luckily, too, in the edge of the thick growth lining the beach was much dry wood, sapless twigs and dead branches. These, collected at cost of slow and painful toil, made material for a fire, which, presently, was blazing merrily. It was a bit of good fortune, also, that in the raid for fuel I came upon a tiny stream of fresh water trickling down to the sea, and we quenched a thirst which had not been the least of our physical woes.

Until the sun set the air was mild

enough, but with the brief twilight of the tropics the breeze took a keener edge. We hugged the fire as closely as we might, the steam rising in little clouds from our drenched garments. I threw on more wood, both for the greater warmth and with a notion that the fire might serve as a beacon to attract any passing vessel. An hour went by, though, and the better part of another without evidence that the flames had been seen by anybody afloat or ashore.

By this time our clothes had dried, but hunger was beginning to assert itself. Likewise, the problem of shelter was demanding attention. I was wondering if some sort of a hut, big enough at least for my companion, might not be built of boughs, and reflecting rather ruefully upon the inefficiency of my pocket-knife, when the girl spoke, with a manner of decision:

"There must be people on this island—we must find them!"

"Presumably there are inhabitants," I agreed. "Still, if there are, why haven't they happened along to find us?"

"Why should they be searching?"

"There is no reason why they should be looking for us," I was forced to admit. "Yet anybody within miles must have heard the guns of the war-ships. The firing ought to have brought the crowd to the water-front—"

"The crowd!" she broke in sharply.

"That's half jest, half earnest," said I. "As well as I can recall imperfect information, some of these islands are thickly populated; some are almost deserted. I haven't a notion about this one. There may be a plantation house within a quarter-mile; there may be only a negro squatter colony on the whole island; there may not be even that—frankly, I don't know. The chances, of course, are that if there were many people, black or white, hereabouts, we should have been discovered before this. In the morning—"

She sprang to her feet. "But we must look for them now—at once!"

I rose, but the movement was a deal more deliberate. "Purely from good nature and not from reason I obey," I told her. "That is, if you are in earnest and—"

"I'm wholly in earnest." Her tone was as meaningful as her words. I took from my pocket the revolver with which the captain had provided me, and glanced at it dubiously in the firelight.

"Probably there's no danger—I believe there are no ravening wild beasts on these islands—still, if there should be uncivil humans—umph! I haven't a notion what salt water may, or may not, have done to this contraption. Action works—after a fashion." I was making a test of it. "Can't say as much for the cartridges, of course. Let's hope there will be no need to find out." I slipped the pistol back into its pocket. "Now I'm at your service, though I warn you, we can't go far. You've no shoes, remember, and—"

She stopped me with a gesture. "We can follow the beach—the sand is fine and firm. And I'm not tired—not too tired, that is. And we—we must find people—don't you understand?"

There was that in her voice which made me straighten my shoulders. "You—you mean that you're unwilling to be alone with me?"

There was no reply.

I said one of the things strain, stress and anxiety may explain, if not excuse: "You'd rather Sandwell were here in my place?"

"No!" She spoke crisply, with decision.

"Oh!" said I. There must have been in the exclamation some of the relief I felt, and perhaps a trace of new understanding. Upon the slow-working male intelligence light was breaking; the rules of the civilized game demanded a chaperon, even though the duenna be some dame of color—always supposing, that is, that our island afforded such protection. It might seem a far cry to the realm of *Mrs. Grundy*, but she was right in trying to avoid unnecessary chances of offending that dignitary. "Oh!" said I again. "I await your ladyship's good pleasure."

She drew closer and slipped a hand through the crook of my arm. There was something frankly comradely in her touch.

"I am not at all afraid—with you." She said it with no trace of coquetry.

So, in good accord, we began our march of exploration along the beach. As she had said, the sand was fine and firm underfoot, and, shoeless though we might be, there was little trouble on that score. There was no moon, but the starshine helped to show the white windings of the beach.

The sands led us round the tip of the promontory and to a shallow bay, with another suggestion of a headland at the farther end. Nowhere was there gleam of a light. The thick growth, unbroken, followed the line of the shore. Such inspection as was possible in the conditions revealed no path leading back through the jungle.

It may be that I was too busily engaged in scanning the line of the woods to take heed of the fact that the girl had fallen silent; though I did mark the circumstance that we had almost reached the farther side of the little bay when she halted. By this time we must have been almost a mile from our landing-place and the fire. Now, halting, she spoke, very quietly and steadily:

"I think it is useless to go on. If there is a settlement, we are as likely to be going away from it as toward it. And the fire is a beacon."

"Then shall we turn back?"

"There is no better plan," she said, and wheeled about.

"I confess I see no better plan," said I, and fell into step beside her.

For a while we walked in silence. Then she spoke hesitatingly.

"There's something I must tell you. You you can't have understood. It—it has to do with Ferd Sandwell, and—and—"

It was easy to see that she uttered the name of the gilded youth half reluctantly, half determinedly.

I laid hold upon the hand nestling on my arm, and pressed it comfortingly.

"The captain used to call me a great guesser. Let me test my skill again! Sandwell is attractive. He fills the eye pleasingly. His devotion was marked. Then, too, he was persistent, and circumstances favored him. He urged his suit so ably that, finally, you accepted him, conditionally, provisionally. But you weren't quite sure of yourself or of him. And you felt that you must be sure before you definitely promised to marry him. You wanted to think it over. You came away. He fol—that is, he fell in with you. It happened—"

"Or occurred?" It was good to hear again the ripple of amusement in her voice.

"It came about, anyway, that he renewed his suit, and urged you to acknowledge that there was a bond—if an indefinite bond—between you. And out of the kindness of your heart—"

There she stopped me. "You've uncanny intuition! It—it brings you marvelously near the truth."

"Oh, truth and happiness go together," said I. "And with your permission, that's enough about Sandwell. We're through with him, I trust, for ever and a day."

I kept my gaze straight ahead, but I fancy she was peering at me in the darkness.

"But we're not through with the captain and the Zoar Hill, I trust," I went on. "The old boat had a good start; she may have given the cruisers the slip, especially as they will be more interested in the other war-ship."

"But the captain will hardly dare to come back for us," she pointed out.

"Hardly!" I agreed. "Apparently we are through with the Zoar Hill and all the people we know on board of her, for some time to come."

Again there was a long pause in our talk. It was not ended until we came in sight of the fire, burning low now and showing little more than a faint glow from the coals.

"Home again!" My attempt to make a joke of it was not convincing; on my own ears the note jarred.

The girl's senses were the keener. I felt a sudden increase in the pressure on my arm.

"I'm not sure, but I've a feeling something has changed," she whispered. "I can't see anything—I'm not certain I heard anything, yet—yet—"

There she broke off. I strained eyes and ears. About the little patch of faint

light from the fire the darkness seemed to be all the deeper by contrast. Presently, though, I caught a sound—a barely audible "grit" of sand under a cautious foot.

"Who's there?" The demand was as instinctive as the movement with which I whipped out the revolver of untested serviceability.

On the other side of the fire a blur in the shadows began to take shape. A voice cried out eagerly:

"It's you, Clyde! And Annie—she's with you."

"Sandwell!" I gasped—and, I fear me, swore under my breath, before I managed to add: "Yes, we're here—both of us."

He came striding toward us, his hands outstretched.

"Here's such good fortune as I didn't dare hope for!" he exclaimed. "When I saw the fire, I thought it was made by some beach-comber who might be able to give me news of you, but to come upon you, safely ashore—"

He didn't finish the sentence; for now he had reached us. Those outstretched hands of his sought Annie's, if, indeed, he were not trying to take the girl in his arms. Very neatly she foiled any intention of the sort. She stepped back a pace. The result was the same as if I had stepped forward to thrust a shoulder between the two. So, though Sandwell seized her right hand and clung to it, that was the limit of demonstrativeness she permitted in his greeting.

"How'd you get here? Swim?" I asked gruffly.

He freed the girl's hand and turned to me. "Not at all! I came in a boat—my boat, for all practical and present purposes—oh, yes, by the way, Clyde, it behooves us to exchange congratulations on being alive, doesn't it?"

He was proffering his hand. I took it—after a brief delay, partly due to the need of slipping the revolver into my pocket. He laughed lightly as he noted the movement.

"So? Ready for gun-play, if necessary, eh? Quite right, at that! No telling what manner of rough customers you might run across. And '*Semper paratus*' and all the rest of the maxims are with you. That's wandering, though, from the purely gladsome side of this blessed reunion."

We shook hands without enthusiasm.

"You mentioned a boat," I reminded him.

"Certainly. It's beached just below us. Boat I was after from the start, you know."

"I didn't know," said I with meaning.

"Why, don't you remember? We saw it adrift—left by the runaway."

"I saw it—but what of it?" I growled.

His manner was admirable, with its blending of patience and courtesy. "My dear boy, when we were smashed, it struck me there was only one thing to do. What was left of our boat would keep you two afloat, but I believed the weight of three of us would be too much. Annie counted first, of course. You were nearer to her—Great Heavens, man!"—there was a sudden change in his tone—"Great Heavens, but you don't think I'd willingly abandon her to you or anybody else!"

There was a ring in his voice that was extraordinarily well done: it sounded like the ring of truth.

"Never mind what I thought," said I. "You have the stand."

An instant he hesitated; probably waiting for the girl to speak, but waiting vainly. Then he went on, the touch of patient explanation again in evidence.

"I've got to go back a little in the story. There was something queer about the way the shell struck us. Something seemed to pitch me clear out of the boat. There was a minute or two in which I was pretty well dazed. I suppose I paddled instinctively, and so kept up, but when I knew what was what I was some distance from what was left of the boat and you two were close to it. I didn't know how much of a swimmer you were, Clyde, but I was sure Annie couldn't make the beach. It flashed on me that the thing to do was to try for the boat the cruiser had lost and then pick you up. Then I saw you making for our boat, and knew what it was up to me to do, if we were to have team-play."

"Team-play?"

"Precisely that. And you shouldn't

complain, Clyde. I left you the hero rôle."

"I'm making no complaint," said I dryly.

I think he shrugged slightly; the light was too imperfect to be sure.

"Well, I swam ashore," he continued, "but getting there was only the beginning of the trouble. I could see you appeared to be keeping afloat, but you were drifting in a fashion I hadn't counted on. So I ran along the beach till I was abreast of where the cruiser's boat ought to have been. For a time I couldn't make it out, and when I did, it seemed to have worked offshore—another trick of the currents, I dare say. That meant another swimming job—and, well, we'll not waste your time with that part of it. I got what I was after—that's rather a rule of mine, Clyde."

"So?" said I non-committally.

"I got what I was after," he repeated. "There was a lot of water in the boat. I had to tackle a bailing job. Then came rigging a sort of sail with a tarpaulin for canvas and an oar for mast. I saw I'd have to work her under sail; she was too heavy for rowing. By that time you had drifted out of sight. Fact is, the light was failing; for it had been a slow job. But there was nothing for it but to lay a course in the lee of the islands, keeping close inshore and hoping to overhaul you. Of course there was no certainty what had happened, but, equally, there was no choice of plans. In the lee of the land and with only a jury-rig, I crawled. Finally, I made out the flicker of your fire. I didn't know that it was yours, naturally; in fact, the most I dared expect was to fall in with some beach-comber who might have seen or heard of you. So I ran in—or edged in, rather. I found nobody by the fire. I waited a while. Nobody came. I was debating whether to tie up for the night or go on, when I heard you coming along the beach—heard you, not saw you. Indeed, I couldn't be sure whether there were two or three persons approaching. And—well, you know the rest of it."

To tell the truth, I did not know any too well, just as I was unable to decide how much of fact and how much of fiction went to make up Sandwell's story. The thing might have happened so, but full acceptance of the yarn and of his version of his motives throughout overtaxed credulity. I glanced at Annie Worden. I could not make out her expression, but her silence might be testifying to doubts very like my own.

Sandwell laughed a bit harshly: "Ha, ha! Of course, details don't matter in the case of this joyous reunion, but I must confess to a certain curiosity. I find you here. How did you get here?"

I told him tersely. Also I explained, as briefly as might be, the little trip of exploration along the beach.

"We found nothing," I concluded. "There is no sign of inhabitants."

He evinced no surprise. "Captain Hubbard and his customers would choose a lonely spot logically. I've a notion there may be a settlement at the far tip of this island, but probably nobody lives at this end. I was not counting on meeting anybody here except some stray beach-comber, remember."

"You seem to be posted."

This time, in spite of the darkness, I was sure of his shrug. "Oh, I happen to have read up a bit. And you say you found nothing?"

"Nothing but a brook of fresh water."

"Good! That 'll supply my lack."

It was my turn to laugh. "You're easily satisfied, Sandwell. For my part, I'd vote for something to eat."

Without a word he turned and ran to his beached boat. In a moment he was back, bearing a tin of ship-biscuit.

"Here—help yourselves! Luck's with us, after all. It's a man-of-war trick, I've heard, to have a few emergency stores in the boats—mine had some tucked away in the stern, anyhow. There's no vast supply, but enough to keep the three of us going for a week, if need be. Water-breaker, too, but the stuff in it's brackish. That's why your brook, Clyde, will be a godsend."

The girl had helped herself to the food, and I was munching away ravenously.

"Luck *is* with us," I managed to say, but I'll admit my utterance was thick and

indistinct. "If we can't come across some residents, why—"

He stopped me. "Man, that's part of the luck! What we have most to avoid is contact with people belonging here. I'd never have risked my supposititious beachcomber, if it hadn't been for the necessity of taking every chance to get clue to your whereabouts. Our business just now is to be amazingly exclusive and flock all by ourselves."

Then Annie spoke, very clearly and, it is to be added, coldly:

"If you will be so good as to explain—"

He turned to her. "My dear girl, it is a very simple proposition. I'm afraid you don't grasp it fully, though. We are not merely worthy and interesting victims of the vicissitudes of the sea—we're fugitives from the law that obtains right here."

"What!" I roared.

His manner grew still more that of the tolerant instructor. "Gently, Clyde, gently! Shouting is waste of breath and energy. Our excellent friend, the captain, sails under a neutral flag, but in his recent operations has succeeded in pretty thoroughly shattering any neutral rights his ship or the people who sailed in her may have had. And here we are, three valuable witnesses to the whole proceeding. I fancy the colonial officials would be delighted to lay hands upon us, and to take precious good care we didn't slip through their fingers. Which is another way of saying that until the matter of the Zoar Hill is disposed of, Annie here is liable to—er—er—to detention, and you and I—well, Clyde, I haven't the remotest doubt that the first magistrate we might encounter would play it safe by clapping the pair of us in jail and keeping us there indefinitely."

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

OUR BIRTHRIGHT

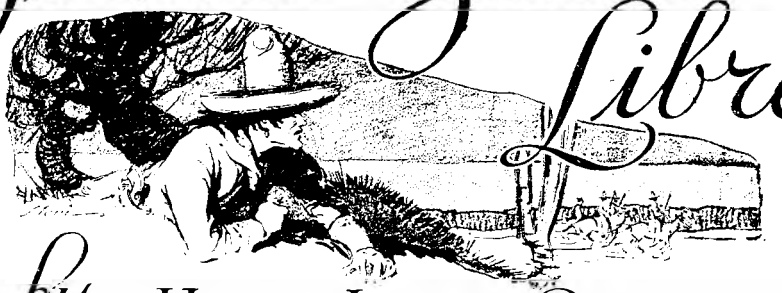
BY MARGARET G. HAYS

THERE was a garden, planned for God's delight,
Where everything most beautiful and rare,
In flower and bird, in rivulet and rill,
Flourished and bloomed, all radiant and fair.
There when He'd reveled in its wondrous joys,
For centuries, maybe—what is Time to God?—
He formed a creature of the Garden's mold
And called him Man—and gave to him the sod.
Later a mate for him to crown all blisses,
Woman He called her—thing of love and kisses.

We know the story that the legends tell
Of their temptation, how they sinned and fell;
Barred from the Garden by a fiery sword,
Toil, Sweat, and Care their sole and stern award.
The cruel shadow of the serpent's trail,
Changing their joy-song into sorrow's wail.

But we, their children's children, think alway
Of that far place of beauty and of dreams;
Lured by the Will-o'-Wisp-like fantom gay,
We blindly follow Eden's mem'ried gleams. . . .
Sometimes a pair of us forget Earth's pain,
And dream we are in Paradise again.

In the Zona Libre



by Harry Irving Greene

THE hoofs of the pony of the Hot Tamale Kid were hitting the trail with flowing, rhythmic beat. For the six months past the Hot Tamale Kid had been dry nursing cows out Pecos way, but now with eyelids closed to hair-line slits and a grin like a crack in a piece of 'dobe pottery splitting his lean face, he was jogging the cow path which eventually terminated in Praderia City.

With half a year's wages in his pockets and one hundred and eighty days of pyramided thirst accumulated in his system, the Hot Tamale Kid was hearing the call of the tame.

"This here thirst of mine ain't nary ordinary dry spell affliction, and it's got to be treated special," he confided to the pony. "Now, f'r instance, you take a *hombre* that's been lost out on the Stake Desert for say a week with nothin' to drink, and he'll get to be medium arid. Or, put a party in an open boat at sea and keep him there for a fortnight without nary *agua dulce* sloshin' around in his anatomy, and I reckon he will work up a fairish thirst.

"In fact, anybody that's got cast away where there ain't any water-holes and who has to chew dew for a month can't expect to feel as if he was foundered, but of course those ain't extreme cases, and they'll yield to mild treatment. Lock 'em up in a combination brewery and distillery for twenty-four hours, and chances are they'll emerge saturated and joyous.

"But my case is different. Here it's been six moons since I've had a drink stronger than alkali water, and when I take my first bite of real liquor in about half an hour from now, I expect soon as it hits my front teeth it will turn into steam like a geyser. Mebby the fifth one will get as far back as my palate, and if I'm lucky the twelfth glass ought to fall hissin' into my interior like a red-hot buckshot droppin' from a tower. After that I might be able to get a trickle going all the way down and at the end of two days be fairly well irrigated.

"That there water I've been drinkin' from them wells back yonder is shorely some thirst-producin' compound. Most of it is so dry you have to dust it off before it's usable, and when you swallow it, it scrapes the inside of your neck like pie-crust.

"Old Rimrock Peters told me that he has took the water out of Soledad pool, ground it into powder and used it to start a fire with, and I never yet heard any one call Rimrock a liar—to his face. It's goin' to take time and perseverance to get me moist enough so I can lick a postage-stamp for that letter I got to write, but after that I can ease along on mebby a drink every fifteen minutes. If that there whole mirage over there was *cerveza*, I reckon it would just about fill one gland of my system."

Thirty minutes later, bridle and spurs ajingle, he rode up the one street of Pra-

deria City and tossed his reins to the ground in front of the Buckhorn.

For two days thereafter he was quiet enough; then becoming disgusted with the monotony of things, he began entertaining himself by clipping off the spinal extensions of sundry stray dogs with his forty-five. Then when the cur supply finally petered out he reentered the Buckhorn to meet the eye of Curley, the barkeep, who spoke up in mild disapproval.

"Put up that machine gun of yours, Kid, and be a nice little *muchacho*. What was all that racket about, anyway? Couldn't seem to indemnify all them noises."

The Kid leaned heavily against the counter. "Them noises," said he reflectively, "were the glad songs of canines as they bid farewell to their wigwaggin' appendages. There was a bunch of them millin' around outside disturbin' people on their way to church, and of course no good citizen ain't going to stand for that. But the dog supply has give out." He glanced around the place. "Don't happen to see any other game loiterin' around that the season's open on, do you?"

Curley began putting an extra shine on the decanters. "Well," he remarked subduedly, "there's our bran' new sheriff dozing over there with his feet on the pool-table and getting it all littered up just like I hadn't freshened it only yesterday. Some of the boys say he's game, while others let on he's plumb tame and house broke. Anyhow, he ain't been tried out good yet."

Deliberately the Kid swung around on the nodding one. Then without apparently taking any particular aim he fired as quickly as one can snap his fingers, while the two high-boot heels of the official vanished in two tiny spouts of dust.

Leaping to his feet the insulted one stood wabbling upon his mutilated leather stumps as he glared at the perpetrator. Reptilian of grin, the Kid confronted him.

"Excuse me, mister, but this here six-shooter of mine is so blame garrulous there's no such thing as muzzling her." He glanced at the weapon reprovingly. "She's shore some son-of-a-gun. What did you say your name was?"

"Laflin," glowered the victim. "Also, my middle name's Sheriff. I'm a patient sort of an oyster, but you've been getting too fresh around here lately, and now I'm going to salt you down for a spell in the booby-hatch. So just hand over them warlike equipments *muy pronto*."

The Hot Tamale Kid's eyebrows raised the fraction of an inch, and he turned lazily to the barkeeper.

"Now, what do you think of that? Here I am only two days in town and ain't done nuthin' but curtail a few public nuisances, and along comes this quick-tempered insect wantin' to sting me and lead me to the outlaw corral. And he thinks he's a sheriff—" He swung about again and stood inert as he gazed into the muzzle of the sheriff's revolver.

"Hand over that gun of yourn and be medium *pronto* about it," commanded the officer grimly.

The Kid's grin became sheepish. "It shorely does look like you caught me nappin' that time, don't it? It ain't everybody can get the drop on me slick as that, and you've certainly won my admiration. So here's my gun, mister." Handle first he extended it; then, as the sheriff stretched forth his free hand to receive it, the unexpected happened. The heavy Colt pivoted like a top around the forefinger of the Kid, and simultaneously its deep roar filled the room. Larkin, reeling backward with a hole blown through his right shoulder, dropped his weapon and with a quick movement the Kid kicked it aside.

"And now," he grinned as he deliberately raised his glass and drained it while one basilisk eye remained fixed upon his audience, "I reckon I'll volplane over the horizon. And I hope you *hombres* have got too much mule sense to make any foolish motions while I'm fading."

Still grinning, he backed to the door, seemed to fly rather than alight otherwise upon the back of his pony, and with a dig of his spurs went scurrying down the street like a jackrabbit.

Knowing that pursuit must inevitably quickly pursue, he kept steadily on into the south, until as night came he forded the river and made his camp upon the Mexican

side of the stream. With the international boundary now safely tucked between him and capture, he stretched himself out upon the scant grass and slept not unpeacefully.

II.

BRIGHT and early the next morning the Hot Tamale Kid was up and off again, destination unknown and not troubling him greatly. He was now in the Zona Libre, where the only law is that of the six-shooter; and feeling fully competent to care for number one he wotted little as to where the next night found him.

He spoke the Mexican lingo as well as the next one; had been in the country before, and now he half dozed in the saddle as he let his horse pick the trail.

Thus it came about that at noon time he rode abruptly out of a thicket of chaparral and fairly into the camp of one El Lobo, free lance bandit chieftain, who from time to time leased the services of his command impartially to the highest bidder of the contending armies.

In the flash of an eye half a dozen weapons were upon the intruder, and a minute later the lone horseman found himself before the yellow tent of the Wolf himself.

From between the flaps that warrior, big and black, heavy of jaw and with a ghastly saber cut furrowing one cheek, emerged to greet him, while upon either side came a lord high executioner with rifle in readiness to do the imperial bidding. El Lobo's malevolent eye ran the newcomer over.

"Who are you, *hombre?*" he demanded with much surliness.

"Manuel Lopez, *generalissimo,*" lied the Kid easily.

"And you have come from where?"

"From the rancho Rey across the border."

"And what do you do in this, my country?"

The Kid grinned. "I had an argument over there with a gringo of whom I disapproved." He touched the butt of his revolver. "So I made of him a good Americano."

The scowl upon the other's face dimmed. "You did well. The only good Americanos are those upon whom the buzzards alight. Have you any money?"

There was no use in lying about it, so the wanderer nodded.

"Search him," commanded the chieftain. Quickly one of the killers did so, placing the result in his superior's hand. El Lobo scowled.

"I should beat you over the head with my revolver for not having more. However, one hundred and fifty dollars are not to be thrown to the coyotes while this cruel war rages. What brought you to my camp?"

The Hot Tamale Kid thought quickly. "To join your noble army, general."

"Very well. I will have you sworn in, and as you are a *vaquero* I will make you a *caballerizo.* You shall look after twenty horses. If you work and fight well I will reward you; if not, I will shoot you. Now, *vaya!*" As sullenly as he had emerged he turned and entered his tent.

In the darkness of that very night the recruit, sneaking on his belly through the loosely strewn guard, found his pony, and mounting it and raking it with his spurs, thus rudely and forever severed his military affiliations after an honorable service of twelve hours.

With a definite destination now in mind he no longer allowed the pony to pick the way, but guiding him straight into the interior, ambled along at a wolf lope, until as daylight arrived he found himself in an obscure adobe town where he had visited upon a former occasion.

At once he went to the little *cantana* of an acquaintance, and there having ordered numerous drinks of *cerveza* and *tequila,* put out his pony. When afternoon arrived he sauntered over to the house of another good friend, the *viuda* Gonzales, for he had decided that the first step in the campaign he was organizing in his mind should be the converting of her to his cause.

The widow Gonzales was a young woman of fertile mind, and was about as pretty as they grow them in any country. Her rather dark skin was flawless in its silken smoothness; her lips bright as a rain-washed rose; and when she flashed her per-

fect teeth in a smile, and added to that smile the light of her eyes besides—well, it would have been a soulless sort of a male person who did not sit up straight and take notice. She had greatly admired the tall, lithe Kid upon his former visit, and now she looked up into his cleanly cut, albeit somewhat cynical, face with a small cry of pleasure.

"Oho! It is *mia caballero hermoso*, El Kid!" she exclaimed as she grasped his hands. "And why does the wanderer return?"

The caller tossed his sombrero into a corner. "Why else than to see you, *dulce?*" he grinned back at her.

She blushed bewitchingly. "None other would be as welcome. And now you must tell me of your adventures."

Holding her plump hand closely the Kid gave his easily running tongue free rein, it being nearly midnight before it finally halted. As for the fair *viuda*, she was palpitating, sighing, rosy.

"And afterward you will take me before the good *cura* that we may be married?" she asked.

Her companion nodded. "It shall be as you say, Cecelia *mio*. Now I shall go over the plan again briefly that you may not forget the little things. First, you will write a note to El Lobo saying that you wish to see him, and despatch it to him, enclosing your picture. He will read the one, gaze upon the other with warm eyes, and send back an *agente* to see you.

"The *agente* will return to him with the report that you are beautiful even as your photograph, but that you have said that he must come to you in person if he would hear what you have to say. He never goes anywhere alone, so you must tell him in the letter that he may bring his two guards, but no others. He will come cautiously, send his killers ahead, and when they signal that all is well he will suddenly open your door.

"You will then tell him of your great admiration of him because of his bravery and honor; also, that you are the niece of Señor Moreno who was killed and whose place was pillaged near here some months ago. You will also tell him that you are satisfied that your uncle had a large amount of money hidden where it was not found, and that you can point out the place of hiding. Also tell him that the others to whom you have mentioned this matter have been afraid to go with you, therefore you turn to him as a man who is afraid of nothing—not even *el diablo*.

"Therefore you are desirous of leading him to it, trusting to his honor to divide it with you impartially. Of course you will also so word it that he will think you are in love with him, expect him to become *dictador de Mejico*, and are throwing yourself and your fortune at his feet.

"He will believe your letter and come to you for three reasons: first, because he believes himself to be a killer of women as well as of men; second, because you are too handsome to lose, and third, because he is out for the *dinero*.

"Furthermore, he will not care to take more men with him than his two killers for the reason that he will not want the others to know that he has the money. At the place to which you will lead him I will be hidden, and then the Wolf and I will have our little palaver. So all is understood between us."

She shivered a bit and her hand crept closer into his own like a mouse into its nest.

"But my dear one, surely you will not face three such terrible men alone! They will of a certainty kill first you, then me, for having tricked them."

His free hand fell to smoothing her soft hair. "Leave that to me, *querida*," he said grimly. "Listen further." He drew her head close and whispered in her ear while gradually a smile of understanding lighted her face. She clapped her hands delightedly.

"You will do it?" he asked.

Most languorously she looked up at him. "Yes—for you alone would I risk it."

"For me—and the *dinero*," he grinned, well knowing the money itch of the soft palm he held. She blushed.

"Yet for money alone I would not venture it. Dost thou believe me, beloved?"

He nodded and kissed her lightly, too lightly she thought for a lover so handsome,

and went out into the night with long spurs tinkling like ice in a tumbler.

III.

For several days after his understanding with the *viuda*, the Kid lay perdu in the little place of José; then to him came a message from her. El Lobo had sent an emissary to investigate the cause of her missive to him, and the emissary had come and gone, saying that the chieftain would undoubtedly present himself in person upon the day next following.

El Lobo was camped some six hours' ride away, and late afternoon found the Kid dressed in a cast-off suit belonging to José and in the saddle.

Somewhat before midnight, having sneaked past the scattered and drowsy guard once more and lying flat upon his stomach, he was viewing the sleeping camp. Before him a score of ragged tents were scattered containing the women and children who accompany your Mexican upon his raids, while the three hundred fighting men, with the exception of a restless half-dozen, were lying about in their blankets like bowled tenpins.

Well toward the center of the camp arose the yellow silk tent of the chief, while before it squatted one of his bodyguard.

Binding his red bandanna handkerchief over his face so that it concealed all but one eye and the corner of his mouth, the Kid slowly arose and went sauntering toward the lone sentry; the half-dozen who for the moment happened to be awake favoring him with but a glance of disinterest. As for the one who sat upon guard, with one hand upon his carbine, he watched the advancing figure until it was close before him, then challenged.

"*Alto!* Who comes?"

The Kid saluted and lowered his tone. "Pancho Cristobal. I am sleepless because of my wound and came to talk with you. Perhaps between us and this"—he held up a flask of what looked like bottled moonshine—"we may keep each other awake."

The one addressed eyed the contents of the flask as does a starving man the bread through a baker's window, then ran its possessor's tattered garments up and down with his eyes.

"The recommendation which you hold aloft is good, yet though I seem to have seen you before I cannot place you."

The fraction of the Kid's countenance which was uncovered twisted into a facial pleasantry. "It could not well be otherwise, since I but joined your valiant general this day."

As members of El Lobo's command were disappearing like mist creatures every night and new men being picked up each day, the one on guard evinced no surprise.

"It is well, *amigo*. So long as you do not talk loud enough to awaken *el generalissimo*, you may be seated. The night is long and lonesome, and in this case three will not make a crowd—meaning by three, of course, yourself, myself, and the bottle."

"And you remain upon guard how long?"

"Until midnight, when Eugenio will relieve me."

The Kid pointed his finger. "The morning hour yawns its awakening, and already I think your friend approaches."

Carlos, following the pointing finger, saw a figure still groggy with sleep winding its way toward them. He arose.

"Eugenio, the saints have decreed that you shall sit down with us, while *amigo* Pancho, our new comrade, pours libation to our success and confusion upon all enemies."

The Kid uncorked the bottle. "*Gracias, patriotas*. You do me honor. Drink without thought that a bottle has a bottom."

With much satisfaction he watched the measured rise and fall of their Adam's apples as they gulped down the white liquid, for there are no laws in Mexico concerning the sale of poisons and the Kid had secured from a *botica* and put into his bottle enough dope to render a mule kickless.

He stoppered the neck of the flask with his tongue, gulped a few times realistically, and, smacking his lips, twisted a cigarette from the inner skin of a corn-husk.

"It is good to be with such *amigos* at a time like this—good to be with the *soldados del Republica*," he announced. And

Carlos with eyelids that second by second dropped heavier, now reclined into the arms of the nodding Eugenio.

"*Sí, hermano,*" he sighed sleepily. "*Esta bueno.*"

The Kid raised his head turtlewise and sneaked a look around. The fires were smoldering, the camp asnore. The killers were breathing stertorously, and for the next three minutes his fingers were very busy. Then for a space he sat motionless as he scanned the unmoving camp; after which, flattening himself like a spread adder, he raised the flap of El Lobo's tent and peered within.

The Wolf, his revolver and sword upon a camp-chair beside his cot, was snoring, his face waxen by the lone candle-light.

Inch by inch the Kid wriggled himself within.

Five minutes later he emerged as soundlessly. Carlos and Eugenio were locked in each other's arms and loudly nosing their unconsciousness, while except for the occasional restless sweep of a leg or arm the camp stirred not.

Quickly the prowler thought. Unless the drugged pair were shaken into consciousness they would sleep for a dozen hours, and should their chieftain chance to awaken and discover them drunk and dead to the world, instead of alertly guarding his sacred person, he would summarily execute them and appoint two others in their places. And should this happen the night's work would have been for naught; therefore, the next step must be to prevent such a substitution.

Quietly he stepped to the side of a near-by couple of sleeping soldiers.

"*Compadres,*" he said softly as he shook their shoulders. They sat up blinking at him, rubbing their eyes. He pointed his finger at the drugged pair.

"It seems that our good friends Carlos and Eugenio have committed a slight indiscretion. They have been unwise enough to get drunk and go to sleep while upon guard before the tent of our general. Should he find them out, what do you imagine would happen to them?"

The two grinned.

"He would have them shot by a firing squad of women," said one who had cross eyes.

"And doubtless rolled in a blanket filled with scorpions previously," said the other, whose left ear had been gashed. "Who are you?"

"Pancho Cristobal, who joined you but yesterday. Yet it seems to me that it would be too bad to see our brave comrades executed for a small lapse such as any of us might sometime be guilty of. Is it not so, my brothers in arms?"

They reflected, then nodded. "Carlos and Eugenio are good fellows, and I should dislike to bury them," returned the one of the cross eyes.

"Yet what can we do?" queried he of the gashed ear.

The Kid's reply came quickly. "Go to them and carry them away; then one of you take their place. Let the other of you throw water upon them and shake them until their brains rattle. By daylight they will be ready for duty and none save ourselves the wiser."

"But what will you do meanwhile—return to your mother's breast and sleep, *niño?*" cuttingly inquired the one he had first awakened.

The Kid touched his head. "I was shot through the face but three days ago and must nurse my own wound with fresh medicines."

The pair gazed at him unsympathetically.

"'Tis a long time to sit watch for another while he enjoys his drunkenness and you have had nothing," grumbled Cross-Eyes.

"And a lot of labor to sit and dawdle upon your knee a sot who is twice your weight from now until *mañana*," growled Gotch-Ear.

"But the lives of two brave *amigos* are at stake, and they are in a position to show you many favors of gratitude," grinned the tempter.

The pair arose, grunting. "That is so, camarada. We will go, for should we ever get drunk they will use their influence with the general lest we tell on them."

Away they went, and, watching them but long enough to make sure that they entered upon their tasks with earnestness, the Kid

slipped back into the chaparral again, glided with Indian craft past the camp confines, and without losing any time made his way back to town, where he promptly called upon Cecelia.

Merely telling her that he had been away upon business, he gave her instructions to inform him at once upon the arrival of El Lobo, then returned once more to the adobe *cantina* of José, where the shade was deep and the *cerveza* foamy.

Came the next evening, and with it, riding softly and preceded by Carlos and Eugenio, the Wolf himself.

Sewing quietly, the widow leaped to her feet in a fright as the door was suddenly burst open as by the burly blast of a norther. Looking, she saw upon the threshold two men who held their carbines in cocked readiness and gave a little cry.

"Mercy, *señors!* I am but a lone widow."

The voice of the taller one silenced her.

"Hist! We are but the *guardia de corps* of *generalisimo* El Lobo. He is without, but first we must search your premises. As the coming *dictador de la Republica* he has many secret enemies."

She smiled, dazzlingly, ingratiatingly. "It is good of him to do me such great honor. Search where you will, *señors,* for there is nothing."

Quickly they rummaged the small place, then returning to the door, whistled softly. Out of the night and into the room the bandit chief came stalking, tall and heavy, evil of face, and with one cheek deeply scarred by the livid line of a saber slash.

He stood gazing down upon her with black eyes that gradually filled with admiration; while she, badly frightened, nevertheless, managed to disguise her fear beneath the mask of a far different sensation. His growling voice, lowered for the occasion, broke the silence.

"And so I have come as requested, *señora.* And to look upon you is well worth my trouble."

She sank low before him. "*Gracias—gracias, generalisimo potente.* Never before have I been done an honor so *grande.*"

He raised her two hands, kissed them, and thrust her not ungently into a chair. Removing his great sombrero he took his seat close beside her.

"And now for our talk," he said with an attempt at a smile that should be pleasing.

Two hours later the Kid, lazing before a little table at José's, was approached by a ten-year-old *muchacho* who handed him a slip of paper. Quickly opening it he read:

He has come with the two attendants who look to be the ones you describe. They sleep before the door, and he is in my *cámara* adjoining. He has made love to me most fervent, and we depart early in the morning for the place of ruins. May Dios protect us, else it will be death for you and worse for me.

Good night, beloved. C.

The Kid glanced at his silver watch. It was eleven o'clock, and he turned to José.

"I shall start early—at four o'clock, and must be aroused before that hour that I may have some cold *tortillas* and hot *café.* You have a small clock that when wound whirs like the tail of the *vibora de cascabel*—the rattlesnake?"

"*Sí, amigo.* I have a little alarm clock."

"Then get me up, for I must be gone upon my journey."

Arising, he climbed up to the next floor and lay down upon the little bunk for the few hours' rest which should refreshen him for whatever might befall upon the morrow.

IV.

EARLY morning found those who had slept beneath the roof of the widow ready to depart.

"Go get the *cabellos,* you fellows," commanded El Lobo of his followers. He turned to the widow. "Not knowing whether you had a horse I fetched one for you."

Her eyes fell demurely before the boldness of his gaze. "The *generalisimo* is ever thoughtful," she murmured. "If I can but repay him—"

The bandit took a step closer, and there was no mistaking the meaning of his words.

"Never fear, *señora.* You will repay me. It is a little trick I have—the collecting of my debts. You sent for me and I came—you will leave me when I desire."

Her heart was beating wildly. "*Si*," she gasped quickly. "*Si*. And may that time be *nunca*—nevermore."

He smiled grimly. "As to that we shall see in due time. Meanwhile, how far do we ride to this place where gold grows in the walls of adobe houses?"

"An hour, possibly."

"And the pick and axes with which to haggle down the walls?"

"Will be found about the place, general."

"And you still say that shortly before the death of your uncle he spoke to you of the hidden treasure and hinted as to its whereabouts?"

"*Si*, general."

"*Esta buena*. Anyway, we will soon find out." He laid his hand heavily upon her shoulder. "But in any event I will not return bootless, for you alone are worth the journey."

Realizing that she had placed herself fairly within the jaws of the Wolf, and that she was lost unless the Kid should save her, she grew cold as one dead, yet still managed to smile.

They rode along a smooth road in the freshness of a morning wherein all things that grew offered up their moist incense until the air was heavy with fragrance. Swept nearly bare by raiders and rival armies, it was a land of desolation save where here and there stood the *jacal* of some fortunate who had been too wretched to warrant notice. An hour's lope brought them to the ruins of what had been a comfortable home with outbuildings, trees, and cultivated fields; but now all that remained were the roofless walls and scattered and blackened débris.

The widow pointed at the remains of the largest building.

"The *casa*, general. It is within there that we must go."

El Lobo shot a glance at the dismantled ruin. He could see across its empty interior through the frameless windows and he nodded.

"Very well. You shall go first, and Carlos and Eugenio will follow closely with their carbines in readiness. I will step in their tracks." Drawing his revolver he waved them through the doorway.

From a corner of the fire blackened room, leaping to his feet as though caught unawares in the midst of slumber, a tall form confronted them, and like a flash the carbines and revolver of the entering three covered it. The one who had been caught off his guard wore no visible weapon, and El Lobo, quickly raising his glance from the other's empty hands to his face, uttered a grunt of satisfaction as he saw standing before him the man who but a few days before had dared to desert his colors.

The glitter of a rattlesnake came to the bandit's eyes, and his lip arose until it bared the red gums in which were set the glistening teeth. Ah, when he got his hands upon this other who had contemptuously deserted him—

He would not kill him—but the things he would do to him as an example to others who might have it in mind to desert—*Hijo del demonio!*

"Hold up your hands. If you move otherwise by so much as an eyelash the coyotes shall quarrel with the buzzards over you," he snarled. Slowly the cornered one's fingers arose until they reached the level of his breast, then the right hand, flicking aside the lapel of the coat, revealed the black butt of a heavy revolver upon which the fingers closed.

"*Fuego!*" screamed El Lobo to his killers, thinking the one before him was about to draw. But even before the word had left his lips there came from the carbines instead of their usual full-throated roar, naught but impotent snappings.

With his narrow, crocodile grin breaking across his face, the Kid pulled his weapon out inch by inch. Already El Lobo's revolver was snapping with frantic futility, while the air was filled with flying cartridges as Carlos and Eugenio worked their levers and pulled their triggers again and again in vain search for a cartridge which would explode.

Then, with magazines exhausted, and seeing that their enemy seemed to pay little attention to any one except their chief, they dropped their weapons and went popping out of the door, the terror of feeling a bullet crashing through the back heavy upon them.

With a heart grown cold as a frog the Wolf let fall his futile revolver which would do nothing but snap and snap, and, folding his arms, stood glaring at his foe with the mingled fear and rage of a rat in a trap.

The Kid laughed one single, explosive sound.

"You ain't no wolf—you're nothing but a measly, sneakin', chicken-stealin' coyote!" he snarled. "So get down on your belly like one while I tame you!"

For an instant the bandit hesitated, then, as he saw the Apache glow begin to mount in the other's eyes, with a look of infinite malevolence he prostrated himself, while the Kid, after a couple of lusty kicks bestowed upon his ribs, bent over him. A moment later he arose, a great slab of yellowback bills in his hand.

"Thought so," he grinned. "This here party, bein' distrustful of financial institutions, was his own bank and packed his whole roll with him. All good American *dinero*, too, and worth a hundred cents on the dollar. Reckon here's where the firm of El Kid & Co. makes a clean-up."

Like a butterfly the widow, who had shrunk in terror into a corner, came fluttering up to him.

"*Quanto* how much, dear one?" she implored excitedly.

He ran the thick slab through in rough addition. "Three thousand dollars, anyway, and mebby more. And now we'll be moving."

Her hand fell upon his arm. "And you are not going to kill him?" she gasped.

He shook his head as he grinned down upon his victim.

"Naw—not just yet. I'm goin' to save him up for some holiday occasion. Also, when he goes hoofing it back into camp broke and without his horse, I'll be half even with him. I've kicked him in the ribs, got my money back and his besides, am goin' to run off his horse, and make a monkey of him before his men!"

"And you did not shoot his men for the same reason?"

"No. I let them go so they'd go back and tell their crowd that instead of a wolf for a leader they got a plumb jackass!"

She clasped her hands and stood looking up into his face, her lips parted, her eyes aglow.

"Ah, *mia* Kid—*mia angelo!*" she whispered.

"And now," said he tersely, "it's us for the Mission Dolores and the *cura* for the finishing of our bargain."

With the breeze whistling past their ears, and driving El Lobo's horse before them, they loped onward. She turned to him.

"But just how did you do it, thou wizard—how charm their weapons and make them more harmless than the slap of a girl?"

His grin returned.

"You see, when they stuck me up and robbed me I naturally noted their weapons. El Lobo's gun was a forty-five, and the killers carried thirty-thirty carbines. That's standard ammunition everywhere, so when I got to your town I borrowed a handful of it from José. Then I punched holes in the sides of the cartridges and poured out the powder.

"Night before last I sneaked into camp, drugged his killers, emptied the magazines of their cartridges and stuffed them full of the cartridges I had monkeyed with. After that I crawled into his tent where he was asleep and fixed up his revolver in the same way. Of course, when the cartridges were in the magazines and chambers, the holes could not be seen, and, of course, also, there not being any powder in them it made them useless.

"There was no chance of their finding it out unless they tried to do some shooting. And as there ain't any fighting goin' on now that was altogether improbable. Say, the look on their faces when the caps kept poppin' was shore funny, wasn't it?"

She gasped. "But suppose they had discovered it and reloaded their weapons?"

His head wagged. "Then I figured he'd smell a mouse and not come. But it was a ten to one chance they'd never find it out, because a greaser is too lazy to ever examine his weapon. And, anyhow, a body's got to take a chance now and then, ain't he?"

V.

Noon found them seated between the cool walls of the mission, breaking the good

padre's bread and tasting his wine. The priest was outside bustling about in the patio, and the *viuda's* hand came stealing upon the Kid's as he finished counting the money.

"And how much is there, *mi amante?*" she asked eagerly.

"Three thousand pesos, almost to a centavo."

Blissfully she sighed. "Upon that we can be very happy."

Over his face a slow smile came crawling. "I promised to take you before the *cura*, and we are here. Also, half of this money belongs to you by our agreement. And now I would ask you a little question. Suppose to your share I should add five hundred dollars and call the rest of the compact a joke, what then would be your answer?"

She lowered her eyes from his own to the yellow pile as within her soft palm there began an insistent, tickling sensation—the itch which the sight of money always gave it.

"But you made me believe—" she began hesitatingly.

He cut her short. "I did, and if you still say the word we will split the pot fifty-fifty and go ahead with the fatalities. I was just wondering which way you'd rather have it. You will also bear in mind that I ain't much of a home-body, and would be away most of the time, anyhow."

For a full minute she sat without moving. The Kid was tall, fearless and young, and she liked him—but also tall, fearless and young was Garcia. And five hundred pesos extra! Was ever a young widow beset by a problem so vexatious?

"Well?" grinned the Kid.

Slowly, half regretfully, her hand released his and fell upon the big extra pile of yellowbacks

"You know I love you most," she sighed, "but—"

"But five hundred dollars is a raft of *dinero*," he said musingly.

She nodded. "You speak the truth. Therefore, so be it."

The *padre* entered, and the Kid arose respectfully.

"I am leaving the *señora* at the Mission in your care until it is safe for her to return home, father. I know you will protect her, for I must be upon my way."

Gravely the *padre* bowed, and for a moment held his hands above the other's head; then, as he lowered them, the Kid picked up his sombrero.

Through the iron-barred window they saw him loping away in the shimmer, while back to their ears his voice came floating as it sang words which they could not understand — alien words from the gringo tongue:

"I don't love-ah nobody,
Nobody love-ah me;
All they want is my money,
They don't care for me.
I'm goin' to stay single,
Always be free;
I don't love-ah nobody,
Nobody love-ah me."

The voice grew faint and died in the distance, and the small nose of the widow tilted a trifle.

"Garcia has brown eyes, and I like brown eyes best, anyway," she murmured as she thrust the extra slab of yellowbacks into her bosom.

U U U

ALTERNATIVE

BY MARX G. SABEL

I WOULD not be forgiven,
For pity lives to pall:
So take you me unshriven,
Or take me—not at all!

Things One Must Forget

by Viola Brothers Shore

THIS is the story she told me as she sipped her tea opposite me in the dining-room of the Waldorf. I cannot vivify the tale as she did with the sun and shadows of her yellow-brown eyes. She is a wonderfully attractive woman, with tawny, many-shaded hair and the whitest of long, slim hands.

I never knew her age — somewhere between twenty-five and forty. I never knew her position; her clothes are of that magnificent simplicity which may mean extreme wealth, or merely the genius of necessity. I never knew anything definite about her, except that she was the most striking blend of candor and mystery, of reserve and lack of conventionality that I had ever met, and that she had a disconcerting way of drifting across my dreams.

When I saw her alone, among the heavily furred, red lipped throng at the Waldorf, I considered myself a fortunate man when she consented to accept my timid invitation to take tea with me.

It was one of those glorious Saturday afternoons in mid-winter when your genuine New Yorker turns happily toward crowded, sun-splashed, gaudy Fifth Avenue. I turned from watching the kaleidoscopically changing crowds through the window to look at her. She was letting her eyes wander aimlessly about the room until they rested on a couple standing in a far corner by the door.

At a sudden tenseness in her manner I looked at her questioningly.

"They're always together," she smiled in response to my look. And she told me how you never saw one of them without the other, and how the woman spent her summers in town to be near him, and how the man would not permit anything to keep him from her side.

"Look! See as they come nearer," she concluded. "What do you think of them?"

I looked over the crowd once more. The man was tall, vital, of compelling stature. I caught his profile — a small nose, high, straight forehead covered with silver-gray hair, and a short, sloping chin. Rather a weak face, though handsome, until he turned around and I saw the peculiar glow in his eyes and the unexpected breadth of his jaw.

The woman with him was small, blue-clad, quiet-looking. If, under special provocation, you looked a second time, you saw that she was rather blondly pretty, with a small, sensitive mouth, a pointed chin, and strange, wonderful eyes, strangely alight. My companion looked at me inquiringly.

"Well?"

"Who are they?" I asked.

"Hardy Smith and his wife," she replied in a curious voice.

"Hardy Smith!" I exclaimed, "the one who—"

She nodded.

"But I thought his wife divorced him when—"

She interrupted. "This is his second wife."

They followed the head-waiter through the maze of tables. They smiled gravely to my companion, who smiled gravely in return. I could not take my eyes off them.

"It's because they're such different types," explained my *vis-à-vis* with a little smile, "it makes them interesting."

But I did not agree. And I suspected that she knew, too, that it was something more than their differences that made them interesting. There was about them a strong impression of oneness — a certain likeness even — that was baffling, until you remembered their eyes.

It was their eyes, strangely alight, that seemed to be hiding, yet brimming over with a story. I wondered whether my companion knew the story.

"They seem to be very much in love," I suggested. "Were they always?"

"She was always in love with him. He was the only man in her life, and she loved him from the beginning. It's one case where true love did win out." Her expression was unfathomable.

"Tell me about it."

For a brief space she lost herself deep in a reverie, which I did not disturb, because I liked to see the shadows tarnish the gold of her eyes. Then she shook herself free, and, with a smile which showed her vivid teeth and brought the lovely sun-glints back beneath her lashes, she told me the story.

At twenty-five Hardy Smith was a handsome, though rather weak and commonplace young American. He was a Yale graduate, moderately interested in athletics, women, Scotch whisky, and making money.

"Just a type," explained my companion, "just like thousands of other well-to-do young Americans. Neither very good nor very bad, but with potentialities untried in either direction. They just don't understand—"

"Understand what?"

"Oh, life and living and their own souls—" Then thoughtfully, "Few do at that age."

He married Marcia Hammond, who was said to be the most popular girl in his set. He married for love. That is to say, he loved his wife in the same way that he did everything else—with the outer rim of him. The inner recesses were unexplored, behind doors of indifference and ignorance.

They took a house in the suburbs, and things ran along evenly. They kept two servants and a chauffeur, and Hardy went in on the 8.40 and came back on the 4.59, and belonged to the Country Club. Marcia dressed and entertained as well as any woman in her set. And they both believed that they were very happy.

Then one spring he took to leaving on the 7.28 and returning on the 6.15. And he lost interest in the Country Club and dancing. And his yellow-stained fingers jerked incessantly at his cigarette-case, and certain warning signals began to show about his eyes.

And just about then her sister Jane came, straight from college, to live with them.

Jane was not interested in the social life of Woodmere, or even New York. She spent long hours in the library, or tramping out over the country, through all sorts of weather. Hardy, less and less interested in what had formerly taken up the greater part of his leisure time, used to spend his evenings with her in the library. They talked and read while Marcia was doing the theaters, the restaurants, the dances, and the rest of it.

Soon he began to accompany Jane on her long walks into the hills, and when it was noticed that they were always together, people in the little community commenced to talk and watch for developments.

Rumors came to Marcia, but they did not bother her. She felt that anybody privileged to the extent of being married to Marcia Hammond could not be beguiled into even the mildest flirtation with any other woman — particularly a woman of Jane's type. Folks used to call Marcia the Edition de Luxe, and Jane the Pocket Edition—she was so much smaller and paler and more insignificant. And she simply worshiped Marcia. She copied her mannerisms and her walk and her hair, and was the most faithful of all Marcia's admirers.

At first Hardy had taken Jane as much for granted as she took herself. Marcia was magnificent, alluring, popular, and made him a brilliant wife.

About three months after Jane's installation it was apparent that something was weighing heavily on Hardy's mind. He withdrew entirely from the social life which engulfed his wife, and he began to find Jane a real help to him. She worked with him, walked with him, played with him. Marcia, who had at first refused to be piqued by his growing attention to Jane, at last could overlook it no longer and treated it with sarcastic comment.

Hardy never answered when she made any of her brilliant, scathing remarks. Of course, there was no break between them, and even the rift was imperceptible at the time. Only he sought out Jane more deliberately.

That lasted several months, Hardy growing more nervous and morose, and spending more and more of his time at his office. Marcia felt vaguely that he was in some money difficulty, but she did not care to trouble about it so long as her allowance was not affected. She needed a lot of money, and she did not want to worry about getting it.

"She needed a lot of money for this," said my companion, spreading a white, expressive hand to include the drinking crowds at the tables.

So perhaps the germ of the trouble that came to them lay as much in her make-up as in his.

It is uncertain when he first started to grow very friendly with Jacob Wuest. They probably struck up an acquaintance going in mornings on the smoker. Wuest was a tremendously big, heavy German. He had an enormous red forehead that sloped away suddenly from his bulging brow. His head came to a point at the back of the crown like a pear, and like a pear broadened at the base. He had piggish gray eyes, always half-closed behind his spectacles.

He was altogether unprepossessing, but both his manner and voice were disarmingly engaging, and he seemed able to make friends with men.

He certainly did what he wanted with Hardy. Not that Hardy ever liked him, but he admired him immensely, and was fascinated by the man's easy talk about money.

Probably Wuest had at first no definite reason for cultivating Hardy, except that, as the son of a rich man, he might at some time be useful. Besides, it cost him nothing to throw out a few seeds. And his wisdom bore fruit, because when the need arose, there was Hardy, a willing tool, ready at hand.

"Then this Wuest was the man who—"

"Yes. He disappeared at the time of the blow-up. They think he's in South America, but they've never been able to locate him. Hardy thinks he's dead."

"I was in California at the time, and the newspaper accounts were very meager. What did really happen—do you know?"

"Yes, I know," she said, and slowly finished the tea in her second cup before starting on a third.

Grenwich & Grenwich, the brokers, deposited twenty thousand shares of BB common with the Ulster Bank as collateral. In some way Wuest and his crowd heard of it. They conceived the idea of getting hold of the stock, dumping it on the market, then buying it in again and putting it back.

"Being a woman, I don't quite understand how it worked," explained my companion, "but those were the general lines."

The whole thing hinged, of course, on getting the stock—that meant the cashier.

And that was where Hardy's part came in.

Probably Hardy wasn't let into the scheme until he was needed. And either he had to have money so badly that he didn't care what risks he took to get it, or else he was so blinded by the brilliant simplicity of the scheme, and the flash of easy money, that he didn't see them. At any rate, he was the man who approached the cashier, and he was the only man whom the cashier knew in connection with the whole transaction.

Benson, the cashier, was a New Haven man, and Hardy, with his Yale connections, was able, after striking up an acquaintance with him, to establish an

intimate friendship in a short time. And it was into Hardy's hands that Benson, properly induced, placed the twenty thousand shares of BB common.

Unfortunately, however, Oliver Grenwich had, before sailing for Europe, left orders to buy up any BB common on the market. Of course, they found they were buying up their own stock, and the next thing Hardy knew, the arm of the law had clutched him and dragged him from his golden dreams of wealth and landed him face to face with a term in prison.

The district attorney, however, was after bigger game than Hardy Smith. And he gave Hardy the chance to go free if he would turn State's evidence. Wuest had worked so cleverly that they had nothing on him at all, and nobody even suspected who was behind Hardy Smith. And when Wuest dropped quietly out of things, nobody guessed that his departure had anything to do with the BB stock case. Hardy was the only man at the time, except two of Wuest's cronies, who had even a vague idea as to his identity.

And Hardy, in the custody of a man from the district attorney's office, had absolutely refused, in the charming blue and gray little living-room of his picturesque little Woodmere home, to disclose it.

Only a small, tense group were there—mostly his wife's family, his own parents being abroad at the time.

Marcia, fiery, stormy-eyed, violent, flung herself across the room or into the deep, tapestried chairs in a furious abandonment of rage. Mrs. Hammond, stout, helpless, remained sniffling on the couch. Mr. Hammond's short legs paced up and down past the fireplace, and small, bony hand clutching and releasing the other behind his back.

In a far corner sat Jane, her face masked, making endless baby-cradles of her handkerchief, and then unmaking them. Near her sat the district attorney's man, consuming numberless Moguls, whose stubs he dropped carefully into a terra-cotta urn.

In one of the windows, his back toward all of them, stood Hardy, his eyes fixed on a point of the window-sash, twining the French shade-cord around and around his first finger. John Worth, gray-haired, keen, kindly, forceful, the family lawyer, stood near him, leaning slightly forward on one narrow, gray-spatted foot, one hand on the silk-covered walnut table. It was he who reopened the attack when Hardy, stubbornly, after having told them the story, refused for the third time, under the combined force of all of them, to give the names of the other men.

"You admit you have no reason for shielding these men?"

"None."

"Yet you will not tell their names?"

"No!" His voice lost a little of its dulness, but his eyes never moved from the window.

"You shall!" exploded Marcia, banging her fists on the arms of her chair. Her father and the lawyer each raised a deprecatory hand.

"But I can't understand why," persisted the lawyer, his voice pleading.

"Because I won't squeal," Hardy replied slowly and without emotion.

The man from the district attorney's office lit another cigarette.

The lawyer tried again, gesturing with his free hand.

"Of course, you realize, Hardy, that it is your duty as a citizen to bring these men to punishment."

For a moment Hardy seemed to come under the spell of his compelling magnetism, and his eyes almost encountered those of the lawyer.

Then: "I'll serve my term and get after them when I come out," he told him for the fourth time, and his glance rested once more on the window.

Like a tigress, his wife jumped toward him, and with her face within a foot of his averted one:

"You're a fool!" she shouted, "a fool—a fool—"

The lawyer reached out and put a gently detaining hand on her arm.

Mrs. Hammond clasped her handkerchief to her mouth with a frightened gesture of her plump hand, and Mr. Hammond shook his little, gray-fringed head slowly and sadly.

The lawyer drew Marcia toward him and, with the privilege of an old friend,

placed his arm around her shoulders, to keep her out of mischief, no doubt.

"Hardy," he said then, his voice deep and vibrant, "do you know what it means to wear stripes?"

At the word, a gasp went around the room. Even Jane paused in her monotonous cradle-making, and Hardy shuddered and went a shade grayer.

"To wear stripes," continued the lawyer; "to go through the indignity of jail—you, a fine, proud American of fine, proud stock"—his voice grew more potently thrilling—"to mingle for years—years—with drunkards, thieves, degenerates—"

Hardy, losing his grip on his apathy, was breathing fast, and the lawyer pressed his advantage, releasing Marcia to give full play to his orator's hands. "To get your miserable bread from the insulting hand of a brutal, ignorant guard, and then afterward—all your life—to be marked, branded, hounded, pointed at, as a convict—*a jailbird—all—your—life!*"

The silence was unbroken. Even the district attorney's man forgot to light another cigarette.

Hardy did not speak, but turned suffering eyes toward the lawyer.

Again Marcia broke forth. "You have to think of us, Hardy—of me. Me—the wife of a jailbird!"

His eyes went back to the window, and his shoulders slumped still lower.

"That's not the very lowest," he said humbly.

"What do you mean?" she cried. "Not the very lowest? A Sing Sing prisoner? In stripes? My God, you're crazy! What has come over you?"

Mr. Hammond cleared his throat. "It seems most unreasonable, as we've said before, Hardy. If you accept Mr. Worth's advice, you and Marcia can go to Europe, and in a little while the whole thing will have blown over, and everybody will have forgotten it. It isn't as though you were guilty."

"But I am," he said miserably. "I am."

Marcia spoke through her clinched teeth. "You've got to stop this sentimental rot. You're utterly selfish. You've brought all this unnecessary shame on all of us. And now you've *got* to act like a man. Do you hear. You've got a chance to do the right thing for us now. Hardy—are you or are you not going to tell those names?"

"*No!*" came the ringing monosyllable. Only this time it was not Hardy who uttered it, but Jane. She had risen from her seat and was coming toward the window, her eyes on fire, her face tense. "Don't you do it, Hardy! Don't you do it! Don't! Don't!"

The sisters were facing each other, Marcia breathless, speechless, burning—Jane, standing on her own feet amid the ruins of her smashed sister idol, quiet, firm, sure of herself.

"*Jane!*" came simultaneously from Mr. and Mrs. Hammond.

"Miss Hammond!" commanded the lawyer sternly.

But Jane never noticed any of them. She went straight up to Hardy, and placing her hands on his shoulders, looked up square into his eyes.

"You're in the right, Hardy. You're a real man—I understand— Don't let them make you do it."

And right there before them all, his wife and her parents, the family lawyer and the man from the district attorney's office, it happened. For, gazing deep, deep into her eyes, he shuddered, and it was as though he had taken her into his arms and kissed her and claimed her for his own.

My companion's voice stopped suddenly. Her eyes were misty and far away.

"That's all," she concluded wearily. "He was sent up. But public opinion was with him, and the Governor pardoned him within two months. Of course, Marcia divorced him, and he married Jane."

She tried to look at me and smile. But the look got no farther than my collar, and the smile failed pitifully. The silence grew painful.

"What became of the wife?" I asked by way of diversion.

Weary-eyed, she toyed with her marriage-ring. "This—this is what became of me."

Again there was silence—tense, throbbing silence between us. Then, with a sud-

then shake of her beautiful head, she was out of it and smiling at me—a smile that dazzled through the mist.

"Let's get out of here and go somewhere and and dance. There are things—one must forget—"

I paid the check and followed her, glad to get away. Things were strangely jumbled in my brain—the story—the disconcerting way she had of drifting through my dreams—and the look in her eyes when she spoke of Hardy Smith, that told me more strongly than her words that there are things—one *must* forget.

Psychology-Stuff

by Will Thomas Withrow

IT is seven o'clock in the evening.

I am sitting in my small hall-room in the darkness of the swiftly gathering dusk.

I could light the gas, but darkness accords better with my mood, which is dense black.

My pockets are empty. I spent the last dime for coffee and rolls this morning.

My stomach also is empty, for I have had neither luncheon nor dinner.

I gaze unseeingly out of the single window of my room, toward windows exactly like mine, in rooms exactly like mine, in houses exactly like this one, on the opposite side of the street. All the houses in the block, those on this side of the street and those on the other side, are exact replicas of each other. So are the people who live in them—"dumb, driven cattle," all of them, with not an idea above the intellectual grasp of a poodle-dog, and not an ambition in life apart from the daily filling of their sordid bellies. Bah! The monotony, the commonness of it all makes me sick! If this is life, I would be well out of it!

My head aches fearfully! That comes from too much study and work on an empty stomach. I have been writing feverishly all day, and my brain refuses to go any further.

I open a drawer and search in it among the disorder of soiled neckties, playing-cards, shaving-sticks, tooth-paste in tubes, handkerchiefs, letters, pencils, rubber bands, paper-clips, newspaper clippings, scissors, thread, discarded pipes, and photographs of girls I used to know, most of whom are married now, and rapidly accumulating large families.

How far and unreal they seem! It is as if they were a part of a totally different life which I had lived on some other planet, where life was orderly and sane, instead of the hideous nightmare my life has become.

I have always thought myself an exceptionally sane, level-headed sort of person; but now, I do not trust my sanity. I am more than half-convinced that I have never

been really sane. I suspect that somewhere among my ancestors there was a streak of insanity, which has lain dormant through unknown generations, only to select me as its victim.

Ah! Here they are! I was certain I had a dozen of those headache-tablets somewhere. I shall take two now, and in an hour I shall take a third.

They depress the heart, and that always stops the pain. The doctor warned me to use them carefully. He advised me never to take more than one at a dose, but I have found that I can take two with perfect safety, and those stubborn headaches require a large dose at first.

The doctor tells me that too large a dose will depress the heart to a dangerous extent, and might stop its action altogether. I suppose if I took half a dozen at once, my heart would stop ticking, like a run-down clock, and I should pass out without a pain.

Well, why not? I'm a failure; of no value to myself or any one else. There would be no one to miss me; no one to suffer, for there is no one who cares whether I live or die. The world would go on quite as well without me, and there would be one less struggler in this devilish maelstrom of hate and cruelty.

Yes, I think I would just as well swallow half a dozen, and have the farce called life over with.

But I will wait a little while. Perhaps it will be quieter after midnight.

That will be a more suitable time. I should like at least to have decent quiet when I die. Death amid the bedlam of sound that rises from the welter in the street would be hideous. I have a feeling that it would be, in a way, indecent, and since I cannot live decently, I should at least like to die with some semblance of decency and dignity.

Until midnight the uproar will continue. The street swarms with hundreds of children of all ages and a dozen or more different nationalities, all of them screaming at the top of their voices, in a strange medley of foreign languages, and in more different keys than any music-master ever dreamed of. But after midnight it will be comparatively quiet. There will be only the maudlin singing and quarreling of belated drunks on their devious ways homeward, punctuated by the dull roar of the Elevated trains, half a block away.

Seven-thirty. How the time drags! Well, I can help it pass by writing a letter of instruction for the disposal of my few poor, cheap belongings, and after this is done, I can read for the little time that remains. I will be glad when it is over, for I am very tired of life.

The door-bell is ringing. I wonder if it is the postman making his last round. There *might* be a letter for me, but it is not likely.

I hear the voice of the landlady (a kindly soul—which is most unusual for landladies) calling me.

I lunge through the door and run down the stairs.

She meets me half-way up, bringing a letter which the postman has just left. I seize it with almost rude haste and rip the end from the envelope. With my thumb and finger I draw out a thin sheet of paper on which is written a very brief but cordial letter from the editor of one of the big magazines.

Folded with the letter is a narrow strip of pink paper, on which appear certain printed and written words that sear and burn their way into my brain like liquid fire. They are instructions to a certain great bank to pay to my order the sum of forty-eight dollars, for a story that I had sent to the editor three months ago, and had given up for lost!

Banzai! I am rich! The world is mine, and I shall have a solid gold fence built around it to-morrow!

The landlady is glad to cash the check, for she knows it to be good, and I owe her three weeks' rent.

With the cash in my pocket, I hurry (in fact, I almost run in my eagerness to taste once more of food and sniff the divine aroma of good coffee) to a good little restaurant in Third Avenue.

For an hour I sit at one of the neat, white-covered tables, gorging myself with food, to the immense gratification of the waiter, who sees a generous tip coming his way.

The bill comes to a dollar and sixty cents. I hand the waiter a two-dollar bill, and, telling him to "keep the change," walk grandly out, and back to my room, purchasing a good cigar on the way.

Reaching my room, I light the gas. I want plenty of light, for I am cheerful and optimistic, and light accords well with my mood. I had gotten in the habit of thinking of this room as a sordid, wretched little hole, but that must have been merely the reflection of my gloomy frame of mind.

It is scrupulously clean and neat—thanks to my landlady—and is really quite cozy and comfortable.

I sit down in my roomy, upholstered chair—mine by the special favor of the kindly landlady, for this particular chair is part of the furnishings of one of the higher-priced rooms—and puff my cigar in huge contentment.

As the room fills with the haze of the smoke, and the aroma of good tobacco permeates the atmosphere, I gaze out at the single window, toward the rows of similar windows in similar houses across the street, and the houses seem to wear a friendly aspect, and the windows seem to be eyes that smile at me above lips that are parted in laughter.

The bedlam of noise that rises from the street below is now at its height, for it is ten o'clock. There are twice as many children as before, and each of them is making twice the noise that one would suppose possible to any normal child, but it is a very pleasant sound.

How full of life and bubbling energy they are! Bless their dear, little hearts, I think I should like to go down among them and join in their play and their delighted shouts if I could only understand a single word of the various languages in which they are shouting.

But it is pleasant to sit here and listen to them, for even though I cannot understand them, I know from their shrill, ear-splitting yells that they are enjoying themselves.

After all, it is a good world, and I am glad to be alive and in it.

My headache is gone, so I shall not need to take the third headache-tablet. I had forgotten about those tablets, till I found the open box on my table a moment ago.

Then I remembered that only three hours ago I had seriously considered ending my life with those same tablets. How foolish I was. But, of course, I would not really have done it, for *only fools and cowards commit suicide*, and I am neither a fool nor a coward.

To-morrow I shall begin work on a new story, which is to be my masterpiece, and which will undoubtedly bring me fame and fortune!

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THE EAGLE SCREAMS

BY CHARLES HORACE MEIERS

THE American eagle is screaming
And sweeps forth with talons outspread,
Aroused from a seance of dreaming
That ominous vultures were dead.

Awake and outraged, for no vulture
Shall rule o'er the eagle's domain;
Though flying in feathers of Kultur,
The vulture is flying in vain!

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

LOVE and hate, patriotism and treason, peace and war, each have formed the theme of a good many stories since man first began to "scratch with a stick in the mold," and once in a while we get a story that involves the elements of all six—and a few others thrown in. Just now the most important thing in the world—the all-absorbing subject—is WAR! The war that, running with the speed and fury of a forest fire, has already seared with its flame two-thirds of the civilized world and darkened the rest with its smoke. And in the war the things of the most importance, and the most intense interest to all patriotic Americans, are the enemies within our gates—the spies—the traitors—and how they may be trapped.

Some time ago we gave you a navy story of more than usual power, "Swords of Wax," by Ben Ames Williams (ALL-STORY WEEKLY, July 28, 1917), and we feel certain that in announcing another navy story—a three-part serial this time—by the same author, we are bringing joy to the hearts of all who know this clever and versatile writer's work. The new serial, beginning next week, is called

TRAPPED

BY BEN AMES WILLIAMS

Author of "Three in a Thousand," "Swords of Wax," "The Powder of Midas," etc.

and is not only a much longer story, but is also one of far broader interest, and more general appeal, while in dramatic power and vividness of color it is fully equal to its predecessor. Moreover, it shows just how a lot of these most insidious of foes were trapped.

The plot is laid in the most peaceful of places, a little summer colony on the coast of Maine. But one day *Nelson Hobart* sees a drifting dory opposite his cottage. He goes out to pick it up and finds—a dead man—a fisherman from the Banks shot through the forehead, and the bullet that killed him proves to be a Mauser, the official German arm. That is the beginning; and from that moment until the strongly dramatic end the interest doesn't flag for a second, and the characters—*Eben Scour, Bill Marks, Herb Lewis, Anne Marshall* and her mother, and by no means least, *Lieutenant Morse, U. S. N.*—will remain your friends for long after that—which, by the way, is a pretty good test of a story.

PUGET SOUND, whence comes a great part of the world's supply of salmon, is the scene of the complete novelette for next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY. The romantic land of pine and fir, with its hardy fishermen and wily smugglers is the scene of many absorbing dramas of real life, and

recently has become a field favored by the fiction authors.

THE THUNDERBIRD

BY HERMAN HOWARD MATTESON

is a good picture of Western life on the salt beaches. Mr. Matteson, himself a resident of the San Juan Islands of which he writes, understands his subject thoroughly.

"THE THUNDERBIRD" is a rapidly moving drama, the story of a girl's lone fight against the elements and against a predatory fish-trap king. It is fiction of that out-of-door, sun-tanned type that we know our readers like.

THERE are things we can sense which cannot be described—things not of this earth. Most of us have felt them at times—and realized the futility of putting them into words. Not all of us have the sustained imagination to base an entire story on such an idea, and actually describe the indescribable.

It may be rather puzzling to ALL-STORY WEEKLY readers to learn that

THE PEOPLE OF THE PIT

BY A. MERRITT

A "Different" Story

which will appear next week, is an imaginative work that pictures the indescribable; but that is as close as we can come to explaining it. The author has painted scenes and persons not of this earth—a powerful pageant of horrors which, fortunately, are fictitious.

But fictitious as they are, the strange scenes of "THE PEOPLE OF THE PIT" seem for the moment powerfully real.

That's one reason why this is a good story.

SOME famous French philosopher put it more neatly, but *Skeeter Butts* hit the truth when he observed to *Dazzle Zenor:* "Eve'y nigger man is a fool over a woman." Our only criticism of *Skeeter's* remark is that he drew the color line. It should be applied to all of us—though perhaps some of us don't manifest our weakness quite so often as *Skeeter.*

This time it was a dazzling show-girl who captured the wandering fancy of the yellow bartender and led him into hair-raising adventures. Only the faithful watchfulness of *Dazzle* saved *Skeeter's* bacon, but then there wasn't so much bravery on *Dazzle's* part, for she was a woman, dealing with one of her own sex—and she *knew.*

The story is called "LIGHT FOOT LADY," by E. K. Means. It will be printed next week.

THE story of a man who put aside fortune and position for art and found happiness would be an explanatory subtitle to "MUSIC FOR ALL OCCASIONS," by Suzanne Buck, one of next week's short stories. The phrase may give some hint of the nature of the story, but it cannot tell you its charm. Not so very much of a story, from the dramatic standpoint, but this has the merit of good writing, plus individuality. We're glad to print it.

ONCE in a while a story is written that has such absorbing *story* interest that its moral aspects are forgotten—and forgiven. Some of the stories of the "Thousand and One Nights" are of that sort—pure narrative, loved for breathless narrative interest; nothing more. "The Odyssey" is another example, nor are our modern friends, *Mr. Raffles* and *Mr. Wallingford,* particularly moral people. We have such a story for next week's magazine, "A DEAL IN INVENTIONS," by E. S. Pladwell. By way of giving you a hint, let us say that the story is told when three brothers—a minister, a government secret-service agent, and a bank robber—take dinner together. The rest must wait until next week.

CHICAGO "TRIBUNE" CROWNS TOD ROBBINS WITH LAUREL WREATH

LAST summer, in the issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for July 7 to be exact, we had the honor to introduce Mr. Tod Robbins to the American reading public. In announcing Mr. Robbins's first novel, "THE TERRIBLE THREE" (July 14 to August 4, 1917), since published in book form as "The Unholy Three" (Lane), we said:

"Mr. Robbins has written a story so very different, so unusually fascinating, so gripping in its strange situations that we are tempted to cast aside all usual editorial caution and shout the good news in superlatives."

We ventured this editorial opinion in advance of Mr. Robbins's first appearance with just as much faith as we bought Mr. Robbins's story after a number of well-known magazines had refused it. Then Mr. Alexander Harvey, the noted critic and stylist, backed up our views. We sent the manuscript to Mr. Harvey prior to publication and he said of it: "One must sum up 'The Terrible Three' as a tale of extraordinary power and a work of genius."

Then came the verdict of those critics to whom every editor harkens—our readers. They liked "The Terrible Three," and we were glad.

Now we are very proud to call attention to the opinion of one of America's leading critics, Mr. Burton Rascoe, literary editor of the Chicago *Tribune.* Mr. Rascoe has devoted generous

space in two of his critical articles to Mr. Robbins's first novel. Under the caption, "*Youth Revives an Expiring Art.*" Mr. Rascoe points out that the mystery yarn of the magazine menu has fallen to the estate of the twirling plate act in vaudeville. It has remained for a young man, he continues, to show the old-time entertainers how to present a magazine mystery story to the reading audience without causing them to "walk out."

"His exhibition is styled 'The Unholy Three,'" Mr. Rascoe continues, "and his name is C. D. (Tod) Robbins. For sheer grotesquerie, ingenious effects, and keen and careful handling of bizarre materials the story surpasses any of its kind that has been offered in several years. To read it is capital recreation. One senses retrospectively that the author worked over his story with the critical conscience of an ivory carver, pruning here, polishing there, assuring himself at last that no obvious commonplaceness should disfigure his work.

"Mr. Robbins has begun by a serious decision not to take himself too seriously. Result: A mystery story in which the suspense is maintained in the means, not in the end, of the solution—the solution itself occurring to you from the very first; a detective story in which the detective is made the butt of ludicrous circumstances; a murder story in which the murderers, cold blooded, resourceful, horrible as they are, somehow fail to excite your antipathy."

It has given us much pleasure to read Mr. Rascoe's thoughtful review. His praise is generously and courageously given. We believe our readers will be glad to find their own views indorsed by an authority.

A VERY SATISFIED READER

To the Editor:

I have been reading the All-Story Weekly for a long time, and I think that for interesting stories it can't be beat.

I have just finished "Three in a Thousand" and "Moon-Mad," both of which were just great. My mother once forbade me reading your magazine, but that was when she didn't know anything about it. Now we buy it every week and read every story—the whole family of us—and we all think it is just fine.

I like Max Brand's stories very much. I wish he would write some more like "One Glass of Wine." "A Good Indian" is very interesting. I can hardly wait to see how it will end; and "The Centenarian" is one of the most unusual, yet interesting, stories I have ever read. And when are you going to have a sequel to "Mr. Shen of Shensi"? Soon, I hope. Also some stories from Randall Parrish and Edgar Rice Burroughs would surely be welcomed.

I like the covers of your magazine very much, only I wish you would give the names of the artists who draw them. The poetry is very good also; so you see altogether I am a very satisfied reader.

Marian A. McMunn.

107 Tenth Street,
Aspinwall, Pennsylvania.

"THOSE WHO WALK IN DARKNESS"

To the Editor:

I have been thinking for some time of writing you and telling the public how much I enjoy reading your All-Story Weekly. There are certainly some of the best stories I ever read in your last issue, November 10, 1917. "Gray House," by Edith Sessions Tupper, was something great. It held the reader's attention until the last word. Also "In Full," by Mariel Brady, was good, and I only hope we shall get some more like them. All the short stories are good. I also read "The Sin That Was His" and "The Stroke of Twelve." Am now reading "A Good Indian." They say "Those Who Walk in Darkness" was great, and I would like to get it.

Thanking you very kindly for past stories, and trusting we get as good in the future, I am,

Yours respectfully,
E. Ray Pell.

American House,
Richford, Vermont.

Note: "Those Who Walk In Darkness," by Perley Poore Sheehan (All-Story Weekly, June 10, 1916) combined with its sequel, "The Scarlet Ghost" (All-Story Weekly, January 6 to February 3, 1917), has been published in book form under the former title by George H. Doran Company, New York City, at $1.35 net. Copies may be secured from the publishers or through your own book dealer.

TWO MASTERPIECES

To the Editor:

Beyond a doubt, "Three in a Thousand" is the masterpiece of fiction I have read for some time past. It's the most amusing, fascinating story touching upon every-day happenings among the more select class of people. Permit me to extend my hearty congratulations to its worthy author, Mr. Ben Ames Williams, for its clever, classy, *et cetera*—in fact, it's a corker.

"The Million Passing Tales," by Perley Poore Sheehan, I consider also a masterpiece.

Being a caterer to the better class of people (the gentry), and coming daily in contact with people in all walks of life, traveling considerably, holding positions of trust in the capacity of steward in notable catering establishments as I have in the past, one must be fairly educated, especially keeping in touch with all issues and

events, foreign as well as domestic, use diplomacy first and last, no matter how irksome it may become at times, as you well know, and to perform one's duties most cheerfully. We all must have recreation of some kind, especially in my particular kind of work, for to please the multitude is no easy matter. I must be a good, all-round fellow, congenial and jovial, looking at the bright side of life all the time, and make life worth while for others as well. I assure you, Mr. Editor, it's small wonder I appreciate a change from every-day fiction—from dull to bright, so to speak—as such a remarkable story as "Three in a Thousand," including the house-party novels and adventures. It's humorous and refreshing to the mind. It should make the most chronic, skeptical crank smile and look upon the sunny side of life once in a while.

PAUL MUELLER.

Room 211, Hotel D'Moy,
Portland, Oregon.

UNUSUALLY GOOD STORIES

TO THE EDITOR:

Here I am again, but the stories have been so unusually good lately I feel I must write and express myself and my appreciation of the hours of enjoyment out of the good old ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

But have been most awfully disappointed lately at the scarcity of E. K. Means's stories, as we surely do enjoy them, and hope that we shall have the pleasure of reading another soon.

My husband and I both join in a plea for a sequel to "The Argus Pheasant." That was surely a fine story, and too interesting to stop the way it did.

"The Sin That Was His" was simply great, and I do wish we could have a sequel to it. "The Voyage of the Nantook," "The Yellow Furlough," and "Between Heaven and Earth" were above reproach. Give us some more like them. Now, when there is nothing but sorrow and gloom and war, such stories make us forget, for a while at least. I enjoy all of the stories. Have no kick for any of them.

Just got the November 24 magazine, and see we are to have the pleasure of another *Semi-Dual* story next week, and I shall surely be eager to get it.

I don't want this to find the waste basket, and hope to see it in print, as the Heart to Heart Talks get my eye first after the cover.

Good luck and success to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

MRS. S. I. DYE.

300 East Sixty-Ninth Street,
Chicago, Illinois.

A WORD FROM NEVADA

TO THE EDITOR:

Just a word from Nevada. I have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for about six months. Just ran across it in Old Mexico, and have been reading it ever since. All the boys here just fight to see who will be the first to get it, and the rest of us have to wait until he is through with it. It helps us to pass the time away when not riding. No other magazine is liked as well as yours, and we are always waiting for it.

There is no favor played with the writers. One is as good as the other to us boys here.

MONT B.

Lazy Y. O. Ranch,
Nevada.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

Enclosed find ten cents for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for November 10, 1917.

I have read this magazine ever since I was nine years of age. I like it very much.

I could not begin to name the stories I have read that I liked. I think that "Three in a Thousand" is one of the best, and I want to get the last instalment, as it was sold out before I bought mine.

I hope we have some more stories by Fred Jackson and Mildred Van Inwegen.

NELLI FLANERY.

Collinsville, Texas.

Please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for the week of October 27. I missed that issue and feel lost without it.

Your magazine is about the only one that my husband and I agree upon, as there seems to be stories for every one. We like them all, except a few like "The Squeeze-Wheel" and "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian," but there are so many that we do like that I say you have a happy mixture.

MRS. RAY L. KINSEL.

R. 8,
Charlotte, Michigan.

Enclosed find twenty cents in coin, for which please send me the last two numbers of October ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

I don't know what I like the best, but I read everything, even the cover.

C. M. SCHENCK.

Huntington, Iowa.

Enclosed find two dollars for another six months of pleasure. I have missed one number and feel like a lost dog. Send it along in a rush, as I wish to stop that empty feeling.

Please get Burroughs to write another Martian story. The last one, "Thuvia, Maid of Mars," seemed to call for a sequel. For Heaven's sake give him some "hop" and let him dream.

Here's hoping that the magazine does a marathon to the waiting hands of

EARL B. POWELL.

Marion, Louisiana.

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