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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Beginning an Amazing Series of Mystery Serials

The Shadowers

Novel No. 1 - The Man Who Convicted Himself

by David Fox


For
All Around the House
EVERY room needs the brightening touch of Johnson's Prepared Wax. It will rejuvenate your furniture, woodwork, floors and linoleum—preserve the original finish—and give your home an air of immaculate cleanliness.
JOHNSON'S
Paste - Liquid - Powdered
PREPARED WAX
Johnson's Prepared Wax imparts an artistic, lustrous polish of great beauty and durability. It forms a thin, protecting coat over the finish, similar to the service rendered by a piece of plate glass over a desk, table or dresser-top. It is the ideal furniture polish—takes the drudgery from dusting.
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"The Wood Finishing Authorities"
Racine, Wis.
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ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME CVIII — NUMBER 4

CONTENTS FOR APRIL 3, 1920

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

FOUR SHORT STORIES

VERSE

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

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

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Entered as second class matter May 17, 1915, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

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THOUSANDS of men everywhere are doing the same. Many are getting more than this. Some are opening garages of their own. Why don't you get into the auto game too? Men in other lines with a little mechanical ability have doubled their earnings after getting into the fascinating field of auto construction and repairing. Ten times the number of men now engaged in the business are needed. Fine, big paying jobs are waiting for men who "know" to fill them. Read below and find out how you can fit yourself to hold one of these big, man's size jobs in your spare time, without going away from home at a cost of only 7c a day.

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No need to pay for an expensive course that will take you away from home. You can learn the auto game at a cost of one-tenth the expense of going away to school. You don't have to serve an apprenticeship either. Use spare time only and keep right on with your present work. This Library of Automobile Engineering and Tractor Information will make an expert out of you and fit you for the biggest kind of job. It is in six thick volumes, with 2000 pages and 2300 pictures, plans, diagrams and blueprints, etc. Every part of every well known car is explained. They teach you everything the best auto schools teach.

Fifteen great auto engineers prepared these money-making books for men like you. You don't have to know a thing about cars to understand them. Every page is written in plain, everyday language and they begin right at the beginning. With every set we give FREE a consulting membership in our society. You can write our engineers any time and get their help on any proposition on which you get stuck.

Everything About Autos

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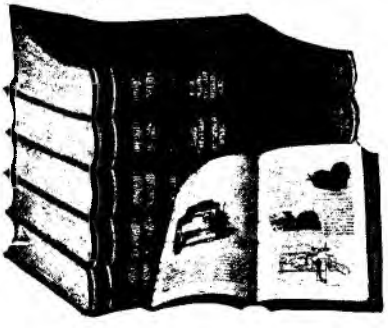

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Just Mail This Coupon

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AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY
Dept. A104, CHICAGO, U. S. A.

Please send me the 6-volume set of Automobile Engineering for 7 day's examination, shipping charges collect. If I decide to buy I will send $2.80 within 7 days and balance at the rate of $2.00 a month until $21.80 has been paid. Then you will send me a receipt showing that the set of books and the Consulting Membership are mine and fully paid for. If I want to get along without the books, I will notify you after 7 days to send for them at your expense.

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Reference .....

Please Fill Out All Lines

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

LIVE WIRE AGENTS! WE WANT YOU! Take orders for **The Liberty Line of Made-to-Measure** combination **Top-Coats, Raincoats and Automobile Coats.** Hundreds of orders waiting for you. Our stock of materials is tremendous and deliveries are prompt. Complete selling outfit and Sample coat free. Biggest commissions paid. We deliver and collect. Join our sales force of the biggest money-makers by writing for particulars at once. The Liberty Raincoat Company, Dept. 3-D, Dayton, Ohio.

WANTED—REPRESENTATIVES to wholesale lowest priced guaranteed automobile tires and tubes on market. Big seller. Other lines added later. Write for local territory. Jordan Tire-Rubber Co., Dept. A, Mallers Bldg., Chicago.

SEND 2c POSTAGE for free sample with particulars. No splashing water strainers. Easy seller. Returns big. Experience unnecessary. Seed Filter Co., N. 13 Franklin St., New York.

Hustlers Make Big Money selling Spring Maid Fibre House Broom that is different. Outlasts 5 corn brooms. New exclusive Patented features makes every woman want one. Write today. Sterling Products Co., 36 S. Desplaines, Chicago.

YOU CAN DO AS WELL AS PASKO, OF NEW YORK. He took in $2922.50 in one county; DeVol, Nebraska, $1159.50; Everett, Ohio, $816.00; Reesman, Wisconsin, $1156.00; Collins, Canada, orders $1542.50 worth in twenty days. New, Modern Bathing Outfit. All homes without bath-rooms want it. You can sell it. No plumbing, no sewerage. Installed anywhere. Make $78.00 weekly. Send for proof. Robinson Mfg. Co., 5094 Factories Building, Toledo, Ohio.

AGENTS—YOU CAN GET A BEAUTIFUL FAST COLOR ALL WOOL "MADE-TO-MEASURE" SUIT without a cent of expense. Write Lincoln Woolen Mills Co., Dept. 25, Chicago, Ill., for their liberal suit offer.

AGENTS—OUR SOAP AND TOILET ARTICLE PLAN IS A WONDER. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

PANTS $1.00, SUIT $3.75, MADE TO MEASURE. For even a better offer than this write and ask for free samples and new styles. Knickerbocker Tailoring Co., Department 540, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS—$40 TO $100 A WEEK. FREE SAMPLES. Gold and silver Sign Letters for stores and office windows. Anyone can put them on. Big Demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 434-H N. Clark, Chicago.

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SELL What Millions Want. New, wonderful Liberty Portraits. Creates tremendous interest. Absolutely different; unique, enormous demand 30 hours' service. Liberal credit. Outfit and catalogue Free. $100 weekly profit easy. Consolidated Portrait Co., Dept. 22, 1036 W. Adams Street, Chicago.

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DROP Everything **else.** Sell Guaranteed Silk hosiery and underwear all or spare time, direct to consumer. Big money maker. Big commissions. Prompt deliveries. Samples now ready. C. & D. Company, Dept. E, Grand Rapids, Mich.

PHOTO PILLOW TOPS, PORTRAITS, Frames, Honor Rolls, Pennants, Patriotic Portraits and Pictures; Medallions, War Books, Service Banners. Prompt shipments; samples and catalogue free. 30 days credit. Jas. C. Bailey Co., Desk A 4, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS: Reversible Raincoat. Two coats for the price of one. Something brand new. Not sold in stores. Latest style. Every man wants one. Binford sold 26 coats in five days. Write quick for sample and territory. Be first to introduce this big new seller. Thomas Raincoat Co., 1607 North St., Dayton, Ohio.

We will establish you in business; manufacture article in demand everywhere, retailing $1.50 under your name, for 35c each; show you how to sell retail, wholesale, through agents, personally and by mail; and advertise for you free. Tremendous repeat business; one of our customers made $40000 one month. Write for proof. Scientific Laboratories, 17 Court St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

TAKE ORDERS FOR LADIES' MADE-TO-MEASURE GARMENTS. Highest commission paid. Write for our free illustrated outfit. Herbert Garment Company, Department T, 215 South Market Street, Chicago, Ill.

INSYDETYRES—Inner Armor For Auto Tires. Doubles mileage, prevents 90% of all punctures and blowouts. Thousands in use. Tremendous demand. Big sales. Liberal profits. Details free. American Automobile Accessories Co., Dept. 165, Cincinnati, O.

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40,000 ACRES OF HARDWOOD CLOVER, alfalfa, wheat, corn, potato and bean land in Michigan's garden bed. Only $15 to $25 per acre. Easy monthly terms. A small payment starts you. Be independent. Prepare for the future. Fine free booklet. Write today. Swigart Land Company, Y1245 First National Bank Building, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA. I want 100 men and women quick to take orders for raincoats, raincapes and waterproof aprons. Thousands of orders waiting for you. $2.00 an hour for spare time. McDonough made $813.00 in one month; Nissen $19.00 in three hours; Purviance $207.00 in seven days. $5,000 a year profit for eight average orders a day. No delivering or collecting. Beautiful coat free. No experience or capital required. Write quick for information. Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. Y124, Dayton, Ohio.

SALESMEN —Side or main line, to sell low-priced, 5,000 mile guaranteed tires; 30x3½ non-skid sells for $11.95; other sizes in proportion. Good money-making proposition for live wires. Write Consolidated Tire Co., 618 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Mexican Diamonds Flash Like Genuine, fool experts, stand tests, yet sell for 1-50th the price. Few live Agents wanted to sell from handsome sample case. Big profits, pleasant work. Write today. Mexican Diamond Imptg. Co., Box 88, Las Cruces, N. Mexico.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO WEAR A BEAUTIFUL NEW SUIT made to your own measure **Free,** and make $35 to $50 every week? You can be the best dressed man in your town and earn a lot of extra money if you write at once for our beautiful samples and wonderful offer. The Progress Tailoring Co., Dept. 284, Chicago.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything. Men and women, $50.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. Ragsdale Co., Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS: Reversible Raincoat. Two coats in one. One side dress coat, other side storm overcoat. Guaranteed waterproof or money back. Not sold in stores. Big commission. Sample furnished. Parker Mfg. Co., 106 Rue Street, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS: $100 WEEKLY. Automobile owners everywhere wild with enthusiasm. Marvelous invention doubles power, mileage, efficiency. Saves ten times its cost. Sensational sales everywhere. Territory going like wildfire. $26 Sample Outfit and Ford Car free. Write quick. L. Ballweg, Dept. 2, Louisville, Ky.

SIDE LINE SALESMEN—We have an attractive line of premium assortments for live salesmen. Commission from $5.00 to $20.00 per order. If you want an up-to-date line, write today. Canfield Mfg. Company, 4005 Broadway Street, Chicago, Ill.

$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 425, St. Louis, Mo.

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MEN TO MAKE Secret Investigations and Reports. Write J. Ganor, Former Government Detective, 113 Danville, Illinois.

WRITE NEWS ITEMS AND SHORT STORIES for pay in spare time. Copyright book and plans free. Press Reporting Syndicate, 455, St. Louis, Mo.

RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTORS: $110.00 A MONTH TO START and expenses. Travel if desired. Unlimited advancement. No age limit. Three months home study. Situation arranged. Prepare for permanent position. Write for booklet CM 30. Standard Business Training Institute, Buffalo, N. Y.

$6-$18 A DOZEN DECORATING PILLOW TOPS AT HOME. Experience unnecessary. Particulars for stamp. Tapestry Paint Co., 115, LaGrange, Ind.

MEN—AGE 17 TO 45. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries, expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

BE A DETECTIVE—EARN FROM $150.00 TO $300.00 PER MONTH. Travel over the world. Write C. T. Ludwig, 126 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Excellent opportunities for travel. Great demand everywhere. Fascinating work. Experience unnecessary. We train you. Particulars free. Write American Detective System, 1968 Broadway, New York.

LADIES TO SEW AT HOME FOR A LARGE PHILADELPHIA FIRM. Good pay; nice work; no canvassing. Send stamped envelope for prices paid. Universal Co., Dept. 26, Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

YOU ARE A FAILURE if you are working hard, long hours for low pay or your job is insecure. Why not find out without cost whether you can get a Government Position where pay is better, work easier, hours shorter, and many other advantages? There are chances now for thousands of men and women over 18. Let me give you free information. Just write your name, address and number RJ 2001, Earl Hopkins, Washington, D. C.

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, $140-$200. Colored Porters, by railroads everywhere. Experience unnecessary. 856 Railway Bureau, East St. Louis, Ills.

$100 TO $150 MONTH. Hundreds openings. U. S. Government positions. Men, women, 18 up. Experience unnecessary. List positions free. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept. R-1, Rochester, N. Y.

TYPEWRITERS

Underwoods, Remingtons, Olivers, Smiths, Coronas, National Portables. Adding Machines and Check Protectors. New built at less than ½ mfrs. price. Write for cut rate price list. Free trial offer. Mfrs. Clearing House, 191A N. Dearborn St., Chicago.

Classified Advertising continued on page 4, back section.

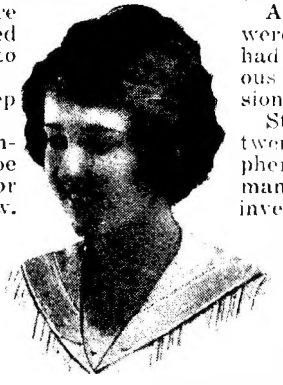
How I Found My Fortune in a Magazine

An Inspiring Story of How One Girl Solved the Money Troubles for Her Whole Family

By Alice Forman

"I guess you can't get your shoes this week, Mary," said Father. There was a choky little catch in his voice, for he knew that Mother needed the shoes.

The fact was that Father's salary and my salary combined would not stretch to the limit of our needs. There were three dear little hungry mouths to feed besides our own, and the six of us to clothe.



And the cost of living does keep fearfully high.

I used to lie awake at nights wondering whether something couldn't be done to make things go better. Poor Father could do nothing, I knew. Years and worry had weighed down his spirit. But I kept thinking that there must be something that I could do to increase my stenographer salary so that Mother would not have to walk about with patched shoes, and so that the children could all have Sunday dresses.

Sunday dresses for the children! The thought was so delicious that, although I didn't have enough money in my purse to buy even half of one dress, I picked up a fashion magazine one day to look for little styles that the darlings could wear if they only had some one to buy dresses for them.

A page of costumes designed by Emil Alvin Hartman caught my eye. Beautiful costumes they were, graceful, fanciful, filmy things. Oh, if they were only for me! I choked down a little lump, for I knew they were beyond my reach.

But oh, how I was tempted to picture myself in each of the dresses, walking about with grand airs at gay parties!

Poor me! For a moment I pitied myself. And then I remembered suddenly that it was designs for the little girls that I had opened the magazine to find. I quickly turned the page.

Curiously enough, I saw the name of Emil Alvin Hartman on the very next page. He told a story that made me hope for better things. He told of the work of Fashion Academy, a school of Costume Design in New York. In **three months,** he said, absolute beginners were learning costume design easily and pleasantly during their leisure hours at their own homes.

He mentioned names of former students, girls, middle-aged women and even elderly women who have written to Fashion Academy to report their wonderful success as professional costume designers. One young woman, for instance, three months after her graduation from Fashion Academy earned $125 a week, working at her own convenience for different people. Another, two months after her graduation, earned $100 a week.

And these girls, Mr. Hartman said, were only two of a great many who had almost immediately won marvelous success in the fascinating profession of costume design.

Stories like these were hard for a twenty-seven dollar a week stenographer like me to believe. But Mr. Hartman invited any one who wished, to investigate. That same night, although I had no knowledge at all of costume design, I wrote for the booklet sent out free on request by Fashion Academy. It contained not only information about the wonderful opportunities in costume design, and beautiful costumes designed by Fashion Academy students, but also enthusiastic letters from former students who gave full credit for their success in the designer's profession to Fashion Academy.

Names were signed, and addresses given. So, to feel absolutely certain, I wrote to the writers of some of the letters. From them personally I received the same enthusiastic recommendations of Fashion Academy. In nearly every case, the writer had been a novice at the time of her enrollment in Fashion Academy.

* * * *

It is a whole year since I first looked through the inspiring Fashion Academy booklet. I have already lost my speed on the typewriter, for I haven't been a stenographer for eight months. Almost a year ago I enrolled for the Fashion Academy Home Study Course in Costume Design. After **only three months** of easy, fascinating work during my leisure hours at home, I received my certificate from Fashion Academy.

Two weeks later I began work as a professional costume designer at $50 a week. I am now earning $90. And Father no longer has to worry about Mother's shoes or my little sisters' dresses. We have everything we need to make us comfortable now, and my employer tells me that my $90 a week is little more than a beginning.

You, too, can learn this profession easily in your leisure hours at home. Fill in and mail the coupon or send a letter asking for FREE Art Booklet 33A.

Fashion Academy, Inc.

103 East 57th St. -:- New York City.

FASHION ACADEMY:

Please send me FREE Art Booklet 33A containing information regarding your Home Study Course in Costume Design.

Name.....

Address.....

Better than a mustard plaster

Once when grandma's joints commenced to ache and twinge, she used to go to the mustard pot and make a mustard plaster. Now she goes to Musterole and gets relief, but does without the blister and the plaster, too!

My, how good that Musterole feels when you rub it in gently over that lame back and those sore muscles. First you feel the gentle tingle, then the delightful, soothing coolness that reaches in the twinging joints or stiff, sore muscles.

It penetrates to the heart of the congestion. This is because it is made of oil of Mustard and other home simples. And the heat generated by Musterole will not blister.

On the contrary the peculiarity of Musterole lies in the fact that shortly it gives you such a cool, relieved feeling all about the twingey part.

And Musterole usually brings the relief while you are rubbing it on. Always keep a jar handy.

Many doctors and nurses recommend Musterole. 30c and 60c jars — $2.50 hospital size.

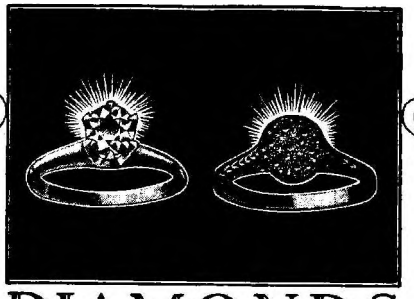
The Musterole Co., Cleveland, Ohio

BETTER THAN A MUSTARD PLASTER

MUSTEROLE

WILL NOT BLISTER

Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.



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SEND your name and address and we will send you our 128-page book of diamond bargains. It is the result of nearly 100 years' experience and shows you millions of dollars' worth of jewelry to choose from—and they may be paid for at the rate of **only a few cents a day.**

No Money Down

The diamond you select will be sent upon your simple request—*without a penny down.* Then if you do not think it the *greatest bargain* you have ever seen, send it back at our expense. If you decide to keep it, your credit is good.

8% Yearly Dividends

You are guaranteed an 8 per cent yearly increase in value on all exchanges. You can also earn a 6 per cent bonus. The book tells how.

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Send your name **and** address today—NOW. You will be under no obligation. You will receive our 128-page diamond book by the next mail. Send your name and address **NOW** to Dept. 72B

J·M·LYON & CO.

1 Maiden Lane, New York, N. Y.

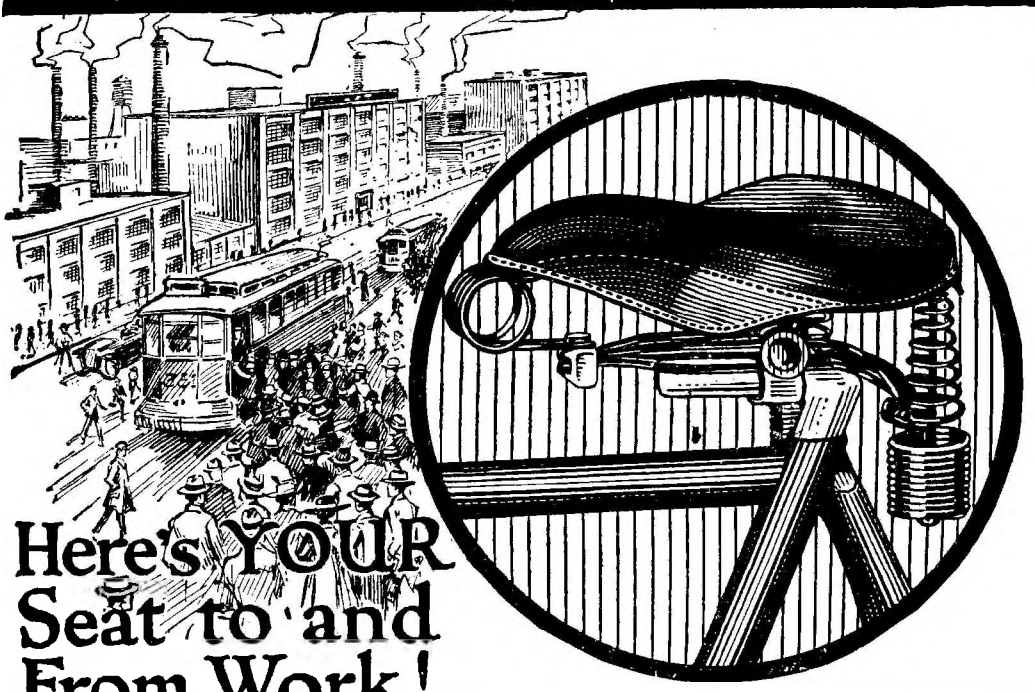
Needed —like rubbers in wet weather

Because Piso's protects the children by soothing irritated and tickly throats—allaying troublesome coughs and hoarseness. Keep Piso's in the medicine cabinet ready for instant use. It saves weary trips at night and brings quick relief.

30c at your druggist's. Contains no opiate. Good for young and old

PISO'S

for Coughs & Colds



Here's YOUR Seat to and From Work!

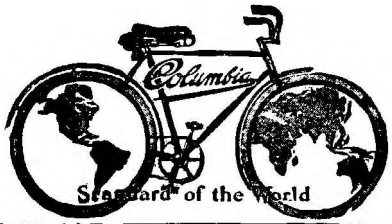
Tiresome strap-hanging is *avoided*—boosted trolley fares *saved*—comfort and health *promoted*—lost time *done away with*—when you sit in the easy saddle of a 1920

Columbia BICYCLE

This American family's time, money, and health saver *is soon paid for with saved trolley fares and a nest-egg started.*

Swift, smooth-running, light weight but powerfully strong; trim, and equipped with the absolute best of everything, you will find the Columbia the favorite wherever those who work with hand and brain have investigated bicycle values.

Your local dealer will gladly explain the superiority of the 1920 Columbia and its many big features. See him *today* and *start saving.*



Send for 1920 Columbia Catalog, showing models and types for everybody, all at reasonable prices.

WESTFIELD MANUFACTURING CO.
44 Lozier Ave., Westfield, Mass.

Ride a Bicycle

20-Year Guaranteed Aluminum Set

Only

$1.00 DOWN

An amazing value. Each piece is made of heavy gauge pressed sheet aluminum of a grade never offered at this price before. **Seamless.** Not cast like ordinary aluminum ware. **All pieces (except the pie plates) are highly polished, made of genuine Manganese aluminum, extra hard, absolutely guaranteed for 20 years.** Yours for only $1.00 down, then $2.25 monthly. Price $21.90. **Satisfaction guaranteed.** Send coupon.

Notice! Be careful in buying aluminumware. Some sets offered for sale are made of cheap, soft aluminum which bends easily, dents with every fall or knock and is not durable. Insist upon genuine, heavy gauge, hard, sheet aluminum. The set offered here is made of genuine Manganese aluminum, heavy and extra hard, guaranteed 20 years.

Everything in the Kitchen of Pure Aluminum

Combination tea kettle and double boiler (3 pieces) 5-quart size, 8 1-4 inch inside, with a double boiler, 2-quart capacity; one Colonial design coffee percolator (3 pieces), 8-cup size with welded spout, dome cover, fully polished; one roaster, consisting of 3 pieces, measures 10 1-2 inches wide and 6 inches high. These 3 pieces serve dozens of different uses, including bread or cake pan (2-pint capacity), stew or pudding pan (7-pint capacity), pudding pan or mixing bowl (4-pint capacity); egg poacher, 5 eggs at a time, muffin pan; biscuit baker with 6 custard cups or jelly moulds; deep broiling self-basting roaster; double boiler cereal cooker or triple steamer. This outfit also includes 6-quart preserving kettle with cover, 2 bread pans, 1 lip stew pan (1-quart capacity), 1 lip stew pan (1 1-2 quart capacity). Combination cake and pudding pans (2 pieces), consists of 2-quart pudding pan with cake tube; two 9-inch pie plates; two 9 1-2 inch extra deep cake pans; 1 colander with 9-inch top, 5 1-8 inch bottom and 2 1-4 inch depth (can also be used as a steamer). Shipping weight about 15 pounds. **All pieces (except the pie plates) are highly polished, made of genuine Manganese aluminum, extra hard, absolutely guaranteed for 20 years.**

Order by No. A5439NA. Send $1.00 with order. $2.25 monthly. Price of 27 pieces, $21.90.

Easy Payments

Open a charge account with us. We trust honest people no matter where you live. Send for this wonderful bargain or choose from our big catalog. One price to all, cash or credit. **No discount for cash. No. C. O. D.**

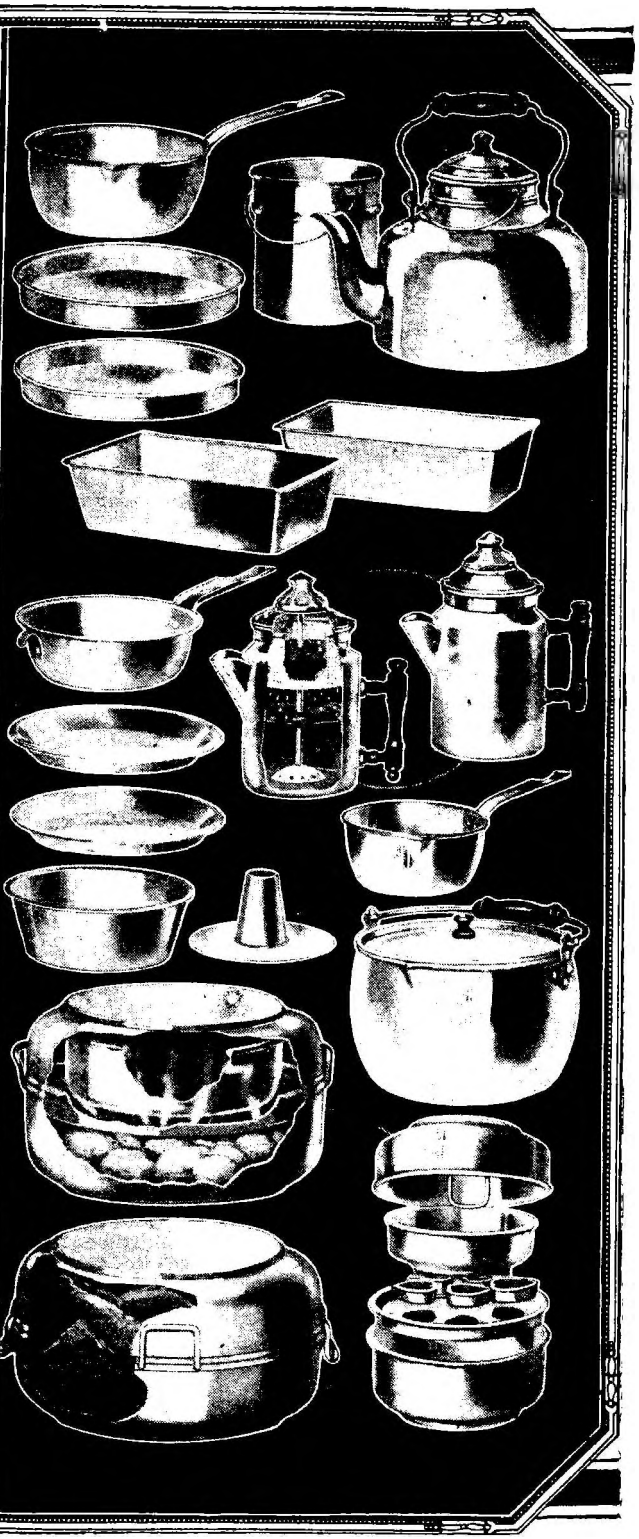
30 Days' Trial

Our guarantee protects you. If not perfectly satisfied, return the article at our expense within 30 days and get your money back—also any freight or express charges you paid.

Send the Coupon

along with $1.00 to us now. Have this 27-piece Aluminum Set shipped on 30 days' trial. We'll also send our big Bargain Catalog, listing thousands of amazing bargains. Only a small first payment and balance in monthly payments for anything you want. Send coupon.

Straus & Schram,
Dept. 1074 W. 35th St., Chicago



STRAUS & SCHRAM West 35th Street Dept. 1074, Chicago

Enclosed find $1.00. Ship special advertised 27-piece Aluminum Kitchen Set. I am to have 30 days' trial. If I keep the set I will pay you $2.25 monthly. If not satisfied, I am to return the set within 30 days and you are to refund my money and any freight or express charges I paid.

☐ 27-Piece Aluminum Kitchen Set No. A5439NA, $21.90

Name.....

Street, R.F.D. or Box No......

Shipping Point.....

Post Office..... *State*.....

If you ONLY want Catalog, put X below:

☐ Furniture, Stoves, Jewelry ☐ Men's, Women's, Children's Clothing

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. CVIII — NUMBER 4

SATURDAY, APRIL 3, 1920

The Shadowers

by David Fox

THIS is the first of a series of intensely interesting detective novels dealing with the cases and adventures of "THE SHADOWERS," a crime detection organization of an entirely new kind. David Fox is a newcomer in the columns of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, but we are sure that those who read "THE MAN WHO CONVICTED HIMSELF" will await eagerly another story from the same pen, and will follow with breathless interest the further adventures of the six brilliant and original men whose first case is described in the six-part serial that starts in this issue.

NOVEL I—THE MAN WHO CONVICTED HIMSELF

CHAPTER I.

THE REUNION.

IN the lobby of one of the city's most cosmopolitan hotels on an early evening in midsummer was seated an individual worthy of a second glance even in the heterogeneous throng which at that season gathers from all points of the compass to make of the metropolis a vast playground.

He was a man in perhaps the late fifties, with a thin, lugubrious face and dark hair graying slightly at the temples, and the unrelieved black of his immaculate although somewhat old-fashioned garments enhanced his ministerial appearance.

He might have been a country clergyman on his first visit to the city, save that his assured, dignified poise and the lack of interest with which he regarded each passer-by, betokened a larger experience.

From behind a pillar near the telephone exchange a stout, almost burly figure in a gray business suit had been watching him for some time and finally caught his eye. The benevolent stranger returned his gaze without the flicker of an eyelash, and with a grin and a shrug the burly one turned away just as a man of quite another type entered from the street door, paused, and then moved quietly and unobtrusively around behind the leather lounge upon which the older visitor was seated.

The newcomer was a man of forty-five or thereabout, tall and well-built, with keen, gray eyes, and he bore himself with the easy, well-bred manner of an aristocrat, yet as he bent slightly toward the thin, black-clothed shoulders, strange words issued from his apparently immobile lips:

"Will your control appear to-night, professor?"

The elderly figure turned with an almost imperceptible start. His bland eyes

had narrowed and over his ascetic countenance a crafty, cautious expression had fallen as a veil, but when he recognized the questioner it lifted swiftly.

"Rex, you old-timer!"

"Not so loud!" the other warned, turning away. "Egyptian room in ten minutes."

He strolled off in the direction of the restaurant indicated, leisurely relinquished his panama and stick to the coat-room boy, nodded with casual boredom in response to the effusive greeting of the head-waiter, and selected a table obviously intended for four, in a secluded corner. As he lighted a cigarette and leaned back to observe the brilliant scene before him he looked every inch the cultivated, affluent, experienced man of the world, and yet there seemed to be some thing tense and eager beneath his composure and there was a curious gleam in the lightninglike glance he darted at the door.

The ten minutes lengthened into twenty before his acquaintance of the lobby appeared in the doorway and after gravely surveying the gay groups before him, moved with no sign of recognition toward the corner where the other man sat all but concealed by the branching palms.

He was passing the table when the man he had called "Rex" uttered a low exclamation of cordial surprise and rose with extended hand. To a possible onlooker, the meeting would have seemed the most casual in the world, but when they had ordered coffee, and sat facing each other across the table the professor announced grimly:

"Couldn't come before. The house dick is watching me like a lynx."

"Has he got anything on you?" his host demanded sternly. "Are you wanted anywhere, George? I've got to know before we can talk business, and you know better than to—er—dissemble with me."

"I should think not!" The ascetic individual's face took on an expression of injured dignity. "After being the guest of the government in every State of the Union, do you think I would have been sitting calmly there in the lobby if there were anything out against me?

"I have been leading an utterly blameless life and it palls, my friend, it palls! Have you anything good on?"

The swift change from ministerial dignity to avid interest in the last question was ludicrous in the extreme, but his companion did not smile.

"The biggest thing of our lives," he responded, his utter lack of emphasis making the statement all the more weighty. "We shall need some others, though, whom we can absolutely trust, those in other branches of our late profession.

"Do you know where any of our former associates are? I had intended to make discreet inquiries when my plan was more fully matured."

"Would Lucian Baynes be of any use to us?" George suggested. "You remember him, don't you? Best smuggler in his day—"

"And one of the greatest jewel experts and art connoisseurs alive!" supplemented Rex, the eagerness showing for an instant beneath his iron control. "He will be one of the best people we could get. Where is he?"

"Right here in this hotel." George rose as the waiter approached with the coffee. "Saw him in the barber-shop not an hour ago and he told me to look him up—slipped me his new monniker and room number. I'll bring him."

In an incredibly short space of time he returned with a man a few years younger than his host, in tow.

"Mr. Powell, let me present Mr. Lester Ballyntine." George performed the introduction like a benediction. "I have taken the liberty of mentioning your little proposition to Mr. Ballyntine, and he is much interested. I find that he, like myself, is at perfect liberty to take it up."

The two shook hands cordially and Lucian Baynes, alias Mr. Ballyntine, the despair of the customs authorities of more countries than his own, made a third at the council-table.

He was fastidious, but not effeminate in appearance, with light, slightly thin, brown hair, blue eyes and a small blond mustache which he stroked to mask the low-drawling words which issued from his lips.

"When George Roper told me that it was

actually you, Rex Powell, who awaited us here, I was delighted, my dear chap! I wanted to congratulate you on the disagreement of the jury in that Los Angeles affair; it was a masterstroke!"

"Thanks, old man," Powell replied somewhat dryly. "I hadn't heard that you had returned from the—er—health-resort to which your physician recommended you, or I should have made an effort to look you up before this."

Baynes's mustache lifted in a smile that was not all mirth.

"I have been in the best of health for the past two years," he remarked. "But suppose we talk business? What is this little proposition which our reverend friend mentioned to me?"

Powell shook his head.

"I won't go into it until we are all together," he announced. "Can you suggest any more of the old fraternity who might join us?"

"Well, without being conversant with the nature of the proposition, I don't know what type of chap would fit in, but I saw Bunthorne the other day—"

"No. There will be no strong-arm work necessary. This is purely a gentleman's game," Powell explained. "That was why I sent George for you the moment I learned that you were here.

"I fear that George himself has reverted slightly to the speech of his earlier profession, but a little practise will obviate that. We will move only in the best society, and we shall require at least three more experts in different lines who can upon occasion shine in the highest circles."

"Rather a tall order, Rex," Baynes shrugged. "Experts in what, for instance?"

"Well, a person who might in courtesy be called a handwriting expert, for one. A gentleman whose study and knowledge of various types of chirography has been profound."

"What is the matter with Clifford Nichols?" Baynes asked. "University graduate, Latin Quarter student and all that. If he had confined his etching to pictures instead of bank-notes and his signatures to those of his father and uncle rather than strangers', he would now be cooling his heels at Newport, instead of cooped up in a Bronx flat. Shall I telephone to him?"

"Clifford Nichols by all means!" Powell assented. "It is odd, but I had not thought of him. Tell him to hurry, old man, for we don't want to hold too long a session here."

"I am grieved that I am not up to the gentlemanly standard required for your new proposition!" George remarked with an air of reproach when they were alone. "To which of my previous professions were you alluding just now, Rex?"

Rex Powell smiled for the first time and the sunny geniality which swept over his face softened the tense lines with an irresistible charm as for an instant he laid his hand over the thin, sallow one of his friend.

"To the days when you could sell an oblong of gilt to a guileless stranger, or a block of stock consisting only of pretty certificates to a wily investor with equal facility," he replied. "George, you old rascal, did you think I was referring to those early wires from the races, or your Indian girl control who used to frighten elderly maiden ladies with messages from another world until they parted with their hoarded inheritances?"

A sanctimonious but unmistakable grin manifested itself upon the solemn countenance of his companion.

"To revert, brother, to the vernacular you deplore, them was the happy days!" he sighed, with his finger-tips together and his eyes uplifted. "I doubt that we shall know them again!"

"Cliff Nichols will be here as soon as the subway can bring him," Baynes announced as he returned to the table. "Now, who else, Rex? You spoke of two more."

"A retired physician would be an admirable addition to our circle." Powell spoke musingly, as though thinking aloud. "One who is not only learned in medicine but is a bit of a specialist in toxicology."

George Roper's face paled slightly.

"Good Lord, Rex! We are not going as far as that in this thing, are we?" he asked. "I'm good for anything under the canopy but poison—"

"My dear fellow, don't jump to conclusions!" Powell said sharply in a lowered tone. "When you know the proposition

you will understand how useful such a confrère will be to us. Can you recall any one who would be suitable?"

"Well," George reflected. "There's old Doc Raymond—"

"Chronic alcoholic," interrupted Baynes tersely. "You couldn't trust him now to chloroform a dog. Pointdexter might do—"

"He turned State's evidence in the Brice case, as you may remember." Powell pushed aside his cup and slipped another cigarette into his amber holder. "Infernally clever chap, but we want no cowards in this game."

"Lord, I wish we knew where to lay our hands on Corliss!" ejaculated George fervently. "Haven't seen him in ten years, but he was a wizard at chemistry; learned it when he was an undertaker's assistant as a boy. He knows poisons that the Borgias forgot, and he can play the gentleman even if he wasn't born one."

"Henry Corliss?" Powell's face lighted eagerly. "Gad, I had forgotten all about him! If he's still alive a night letter to No. 053 Vernon Avenue, St. Louis, will bring him. I'll send it when we leave here. How are you, Cliff? Glad to see you with us!"

He arose and shook the slender, tapering white hand of an esthetic-looking individual who had strolled toward their table. The latest arrival was well under forty and the soft collar and bow tie which he affected made him appear even younger, although there were tired lines about the pale, cold eyes behind broad-rimmed glasses, and the slightly long hair, spiked mustache and tiny, dark goatee lent him an air of studied eccentricity.

There were lingering signs, too, of a significant pallor upon his finely chiseled features, and he greeted the others with short, halting phrases as though speech came not easily to him.

"How long—" Powell asked with a note of sympathy in his tone as Clifford Nichols took the last vacant chair.

"Three months," responded the other listlessly. "I can't seem to come back this time as I did before. Getting neurasthenic, I imagine.

"That is why I rather jumped at your message, old man. Glad to get out of a rut. I say, what is the big idea? I'll have a try at anything, but they'll never take me again. It would be life next time, you know, and I'm fed up on the State's hospitality."

"They'll never take you on this proposition of mine, my boy. There's just one more of the old fraternity with whom I want to get in touch and then I'll outline it to you. Do you know when Philip Howe will be out?"

"Susceptible Phil?" Nichols shrugged. "When I left he was in solitary for making eyes at the warden's daughter. Poor little chap! He'll be out next Wednesday, though; had a note from him yesterday *via* the underground."

"Wednesday," Powell repeated. "Henry Corliss will be here by then if my wire reaches him, and our circle, as George would say, will be complete. I shall have a lot to arrange in the mean time, but one of you must go up and meet Phil as he leaves the gates. I don't want him to fall into any other hands until I have put my proposition up to him."

"Not I!" Nichols shuddered. "I see it at night now, when I can get any sleep at all."

"I will go," George volunteered. "I'll hang on to that erring youth until we meet again. But when and where will that be, Rex?

"Not here, surely. Even though our consciences are all spotless for the moment I do not like the attentions of my friend the house-detective. He is a coarse and skeptical creature and his opinion of his fellow men is shockingly degraded."

Rex Powell glanced at his watch.

"We will meet," he announced, "at exactly ten o'clock next Thursday morning in suite 17-20 in the new Bolingbroke Building on Forty-Second Street. Is it understood, gentlemen? Those who do not care to go into the proposition may withdraw, and I shall not even impose secrecy on them."

"Phew!" whistled George and as instantly unpuckered his lips into their usual thin line. "What kind of a game is this, anyway, Rex? And the Bolingbroke, too; new-

est and biggest of the office buildings. Who do we ask for when we come?"

"Find the number and walk in. I shall be there," Powell responded. "At ten o'clock Thursday, then; suite 17-20. Waiter, my check."

CHAPTER II.

AN UNEXPECTED PROPOSAL.

PRECISELY to the moment on the day appointed, Lucian Baynes and Clifford Nichols opened the door of suite No. 17-20, and paused on the threshold.

They found themselves in a tiny, but richly appointed anteroom with exquisitely carved old chairs, faded, mellow rugs of obvious antiquity and almost priceless value and a painting or two upon the walls, at sight of which Baynes, the connoisseur, caught his breath in wordless appreciation. Over it all the glow of indirect lighting cast its soft effulgence, and although there were no windows a noiseless, unseen fan breathed a cool, refreshing wave of air upon them.

There was one incongruous note in the perfect room, however. It was furnished by a fluffy, golden-haired young person who sat behind an inlaid desk immediately opposite the entrance door, and whose jaws worked rhythmically and with such vigor that they forced her small red lips apart as she bent a steady gaze upon the visitors.

"I fear that we have made a mistake—" Baynes began, but even as he uttered the first syllable his quick eyes noted that one of the girl's slim fingers had touched a bit of the lighter grained, inlaid wood upon the desk, and she smiled. "We were looking for a gentleman—"

"Mr. Powell?" The small jaws ceased their rhythmic motion for a moment. "He's expecting you. Go right in."

She rose and turning to the wall immediately beside her desk, moved aside a panel which slipped on noiseless rollers behind a picture. In the aperture, beside a handsome table black with age about which six huge leather chairs had been arranged, stood Rex Powell in an office in which rugs and appointments bespoke the same quiet elegance as the anteroom.

One of the chairs was already occupied and by a stranger, an exceedingly fat, exceedingly bald man of perhaps fifty, whose smooth, broad face bore a benevolent smile and who rubbed his plump hands together in unctous welcome as he awaited an introduction.

"Good morning, Lucian. You're looking better, Cliff, old man. Allow me to present Henry Corliss, Dr. Corliss, for our professional purposes. He is an old friend of mine and I believe will prove a valued associate." Powell motioned toward the stranger and when the formal acknowledgments had been made he gestured about the office. "What do you think of our new sanctum?"

Clifford Nichols sank into a chair, his tapering fingers drumming lightly on its arms. The panel by means of which they had entered had slid silently back into place, and he saw that the room was hexagonal in shape, and in the center of each side he described a panel similar to the first.

"The effect is excellent, Rex," Baynes responded. "But why a genuine Van Dyke in the same room with a young person who masticates wintergreen gum? It is a false note, old chap."

"I say, why is this room six-sided, and what is behind each of the other panels?" demanded Nichols.

Powell laughed pleasantly.

"You will see for yourself presently. But wait!"

He had seated himself once more in his chair at the head of the long table and now his hand slipped beneath its edge. Instantly, as clearly as though it were breathed into their very ears they heard the smooth, sympathetically paternal tones of George Roper.

"My dear young lady, can you tell me where we can find—"

Powell's hand tensed beneath the table's edge and he rose again as the panel swung back, disclosing the familiar, tall, gaunt figure of George clad in ministerial black, and just behind him a small dapper man of about thirty-five with a weak but undeniably handsome face and irrepressibly merry eyes in which a trace of cowed furtiveness still lingered.

"Come in George. Here is your old friend Henry Corliss. Philip, my boy!" Powell grasped the hand of the last arrival, and shook it warmly. "Gentlemen, those of you who have never met Mr. Howe will have the pleasure of knowing the greatest safe-cracker of the age. There isn't a combination ever invented that he cannot work and as for the less subtle methods he is an expert in all of them, from nitro and violet rays to electricity."

The slim little dandy's pale face flushed with pardonable pride beneath the other's praise and when they were all seated, his eyes glanced curiously about the room and back with eager expectancy to the man who had greeted him.

"Gentlemen," began Rex Powell. "I know you all want to know without loss of time why I have called you together for this meeting. The proposition I have to put to you is a startling one, but I ask that you let me have the floor until I have finished.

"I have already said that any one who wishes to drop out may do so. I have worked with all of you at one time or another in each of your special lines, and you know that I am a man of my word."

"You've never been sent up, Rex, either!" Philip Howe broke in irrepressibly.

"The luck of the game!" Powell shrugged. "However, I want to ask you one question, gentlemen. How many of you have averaged ten thousand a year every year since you started in your several lines of work?

"Come, Lucian, you've dealt in the riches of the earth, while we have been piking along. Have you averaged ten thousand a year, counting the years that you have been—er—retired from the practise of your profession?"

"I cannot say that I ever kept a budget." Baynes stroked his small blond mustache. "I have made one or two exceedingly rich hauls, and got away with many that were well worth while, but counting the periods you mention I doubt if I have averaged more than half the sum you have named."

"Ten thousand!" sighed George. "Are you—er—smoking anything stronger than Havana tobacco these days, dear friend?"

"Exactly," Powell resumed. "If I tell you that I have a proposition that will net each of us more than that in a year for as many years as we care to carry on; that the authorities will never hear of our activities, or if they do, that we shall be absolutely immune from them; when I tell you that we will be merely using our specialized knowledge in another way, safe, sure and highly profitable, will you take my word for it and go in with me?"

There was a pause and then Nichols asked:

"What is the proposition, Rex?"

Rex Powell bent forward suddenly in his chair.

"That we become honest men."

CHAPTER III.

THE SHADOWERS, INC.

FOR a moment they sat spellbound with sheer amazement, and then the dapper little safe-cracker exclaimed disgustedly:

"Hell!"

"Did you bring me all the way on from St. Louis to hand me the reformer's line of talk, Rex?" The "doctor's" fat face was comical in its dismayed reproach. "I thought you had something on that was worth while!"

"Ten thousand a year! Dear old chap, you're not serious!" Lucian Baynes expostulated. "As an art critic I fancy I shouldn't get very far with my record and I cannot imagine any other reputable pursuit that would be congenial."

"I feared there was a fly in the ointment." George Roper shook his gray head mournfully. Only Clifford Nichols was silent, his nearsighted eyes fixed on the inscrutable face of the man at the head of the table.

The latter turned swiftly to the author of the first ejaculation.

"Phil, if you saw a safe that had been rifled could you tell how it had been entered? Could you gage the cleverness or bungling stupidity of the man who had opened it?"

Philip Howe smiled in an infinitely superior manner.

"Better than any one else in America, I guess," he replied modestly.

"Very good." Powell pointed a finger at the lugubrious face of George Roper. "George, when you were in the fake spiritualistic game, your best play was to work on the emotions and credulity of your clients, wasn't it?

"Call it psychology, if you want to; it amounts to the same thing in your case. You questioned them adroitly, suggested, led them on to tell you things which you afterward 'revealed' to them; grew to be a mighty clever cross-examiner, didn't you?"

George nodded complacently.

"That is about the size of it," he remarked.

"Lucian, you're an adept at smuggling." Powell faced the man at his left. "But to make it profitable, to become the head of your profession you had to learn the real from the spurious, didn't you? And in doing so you have become perhaps the greatest jewel expert and connoisseur of objects of art to-day."

"Oh, come, my dear chap!" Baynes deprecated.

"And you, Cliff," continued Powell. "I fancy you could tell the cleverest counterfeit, bills or coin, at a glance, couldn't you? As for handwriting, couldn't you beat the most celebrated expert who was ever called into court at his own game? You've studied every line and curve and slant and space—"

"I have," admitted Nichols with a slight flush. "But what are you driving at, Rex?"

"You, Henry." Powell turned to the last man. "You're a chemist, a toxicologist. If poison were administered to any one, you could diagnose the case or at least discover by analysis what the nature of the poison was as well as any coroner or medical examiner that ever lived."

"I ought to be able to!" Henry Corliss emitted a fat chuckle. "But what are you picking on us for, Rex?"

"Merely this. You are each a specialist in your own line, only we have all tackled the game from the wrong side; wrong not necessarily from the reformer's standpoint, but from the standpoint of practicability and profit.

"Look here! Suppose instead of a smuggler, Lucian became a tracer of stolen jewels and rare pictures; suppose instead of a forger and counterfeiter, Clifford used his extraordinary genius to detect forgery and counterfeiting; suppose George turned his subtle, psychological methods of wringing facts from people to good account by cross-examining informal and unconscious witnesses; suppose instead of safe-cracking, Philip—"

"Stop right there, Rex!" Philip Howe blazed out at him. "I see the game now! If you think that I'm going to turn on my old pals and sell them out—if you think I am going to become a phony detective, dig out evidence against the boys who have stuck to me through thick and thin and perjured themselves for me, and then hand them over to the police—"

"I think nothing of the kind, Phil!" Powell turned sharply on him. "I told you our activities need never reach the knowledge of the police, and I mean it. Have you ever stopped to think of the number of cases which are never reported because the victims themselves for one reason or another have no desire to court investigation or publicity? In the case of theft they may not themselves have come honestly by the thing stolen, or they may suspect their own relatives and only desire to recover what is gone.

"Forgery, blackmail, fraud, and chicane of all sorts; there is no end to the big cases we might get and the enormous fees we might take in with a confidential investigating agency of a kind which has never been tried before in the world! Restitution, not prosecution is my idea, and we won't double-cross our friends or turn any one over to the police unless he proves to be a rotter and a rank outsider even in the case of murder, should we decide that the person killed deserved his death.

"We'll hold court ourselves when we find the guilty one, and acquit or condemn him by majority vote. Will that satisfy your scruples?"

"Majority, with six of us?" George asked slowly.

"We'll arrange it so that no one of us knows what the others have voted and if

the count is even I promise to step out," Powell responded. "Is that fair?"

"Fair enough," Nichols declared. There was a bright spot of color in his cheeks and his pale eyes glowed behind their glasses. "By Jove, old man, I think you have hit upon a master plan, but how are we going to get our clients? If there is to be no advertising, no publicity, we might sit here till the crack of doom, waiting for some one to fall into that door out there."

"A private detective agency which advertises in the newspapers defeats its own ends unless it is only looking for shady divorce cases or the smaller fry," Powell explained. "I figure that if you fellows all come in we could handle every sort of case which might come our way.

"We've an organization here that covers every crime in the calendar, but we only want the cases of people who would ordinarily fly from the general run of private agencies and the police. Discretion is our biggest asset to gain the confidence of the right people; we've got to reach them in their homes."

"A fine chance we have of that, or of staying in business a week, either, when our own records come out." Philip was still unconvinced.

"How are they to do so, if we work not only independently of the police, but practically without their knowledge?" demanded Powell. "I propose to call our organization 'The Shadowers' and incorporate it as a *bona fide* concern, as indeed it will be.

"If any one does come to look us up, they will find only little Miss Jepson out there, and she can tell a straight story. Moreover, that young person can smell a plain-clothes man a block off, she says, and I am inclined to believe her."

"Heavens, do you mean to tell me that that little queen out there is one of us?" Philip gasped. "Noticed her when we came in. Holy cat! What eyes!"

"She is a find of mine," replied Powell. "I trailed her and watched her work for several days, and she is the niftiest little shoplifter this town ever saw! I had to pretend it was a pinch in order to get a chance to talk to her at all, but when I told her who I was and disclosed enough about our records to fill her with admiration she was glad and proud to throw her lot in with us.

"She is an expert office manager and stenographer—that was her line until Lefty Jane got hold of her and showed her how much easier it was to steal. If she knew we were going in for a legitimate thing she would desert us in disgust, but we are all heroes to her now, poor kid!"

"*Are* we going in for it?" Lucian Baynes looked from one to the other of them. "I admit that it looks like a good thing and it would certainly be a novel experience, but I see the same difficulty that Cliff has mentioned. How shall we get our cases?"

"You told us last week that this proposition meant moving in high society," George remarked. "Now you say that we have got to reach people in their homes. If you mean that you are going from house to house soliciting trade to help them unearth their family skeletons, you won't find a very warm welcome."

"I have had five hundred little notes engraved upon the best quality note paper, invitation size, and I purpose to send them to five hundred matrons whose names I have culled from the Blue Book, and my own knowledge of the oldest and most exclusive families in town," responded Powell. "Here is a sample. How does it read to you?"

He handed a square of note-paper to Nichols, and as the other perused it a slight smile broke over his face.

"Capital!" Nichols exclaimed. "Listen to this: 'Dear Madam: Should you find yourself in need of any discreet, strictly confidential investigation by a private corporation of gentlemen, not blackmailers or inefficient bunglers, send your visiting card to "The Shadowers, Inc.," and an expert will call upon you at once. No divorce evidence or investigation of a scandalous or trivial nature will be undertaken. We have positively no connection with any so-called private detective agency, give no information to the press, permit no publicity, and never carry our results to the authorities unless expressly requested to do so by our clients. If you miss any documents, jewels or other valuables of great importance: if any one of your acquaintance is being sub-

jected to blackmail; if your handwriting has been forged or you fear for the safety of some one near to you, communicate with us. Most respectfully yours, The Shadowers, Inc.'"

CHAPTER IV.

THE CLIENT.

"SUPPOSE some old dame feels herself insulted by the insinuation, and takes your little missive to the police, Rex?" Henry Corliss suggested with a chuckle. "The investigation will begin at this end, and if they cannot hang anything on any of us, a column in the press will make The Shadowers fade into the shadows mighty quick!"

"These will go only to ladies who could afford no connection with the publicity which would follow. The woman who receives one will realize that all her friends would believe there was some special reason for the communication having been sent her, and that alone would effectually close her lips." Powell smiled. "I am sending five hundred other letters, differing slightly in tone, to as many financiers here and in other cities. After that it must be a waiting game, of course, but I don't think it will be long."

"Well," Henry Corliss planted his fat hands on the table and gazed about at the serious, intent faces. "I'm with you, Rex. How is it with the rest?"

"I, too."

"And I." The responses came almost simultaneously from Baynes and Nichols.

"Well, I'll try anything once, and Rex has never steered me wrong yet," Philip announced. "But I'm going to state right here that if I hit upon the trail of any of my old friends I drop the whole thing right there. The boys have been good to me, and if they are smart enough to get away with anything from that bunch they are welcome to keep it as far as I'm concerned."

"As for me," supplemented George, "I'm with you all, as I said. but life is short and I am getting on in years. I hope something starts soon."

"Then it is settled. gentlemen." Powell rose. "The Shadowers, Inc., is actively in business. Now let me show you your private offices and then we will go to lunch."

He opened the panel to the left of that by which they had entered and disclosed an office similar in size to the anteroom, and like it suffused with indirect lighting.

Here the resemblance ended, however. The floor was of marble, a porcelain sink and wash basin stood in one corner, and the table, cabinets and shelves—which with a chair or two completed the furnishings of the room—were enameled and glass covered. Retorts, strange instruments of delicate mechanism and vials and jars of various chemicals stood about, and Powell took them all in with a comprehensive wave of his hand as he turned to the dumfounded Henry Corliss.

"Your laboratory, doctor. How do you like it?"

Without vouchsafing a reply Henry Corliss moved about the room dazedly fingering a retort here, a vial there, and when he paused again before Powell his fat, placid face had undergone a miraculous change. It was no longer that of a shrewd, good-natured rogue; his small eyes glowed with enthusiasm, and keen, eager lines lent character to the pendulous cheeks. The criminal was lost in the scientist and it was the latter who spoke.

"I've always dreamed of a laboratory like this! Rex, I shall do big things here, perhaps even perfect—" He broke off, and Powell patted him affectionately.

"I am sure you will, but don't let your researches interfere with business, you know. The next office is Cliff's."

He led the way back into the center room and through the third sliding panel. There they beheld walls lined with handsomely bound books of reference and a table covered with magnifying glasses, weighing machines and bottles of various acids, dyes and inks.

It was with difficulty that Clifford could be torn away to accompany them to the next office which, unlike the others, was brilliant with the sunshine from two wide windows through which could be seen a wide vista over neighboring rooftops to the broad, distant river.

"No need to tell me where I get off," Philip Howe cried excitedly, pointing to the tools and instruments scattered about, and the batteries and jars on the long shelves. "With these to help me, I could get into the Bank of England! Say, Rex—"

"No turning any tricks on the side, my boy. That must be understood between us all. We're honest men now, remember, and as soon as one of us wants to quit the game he has only to say so, but while he remains a member of this organization he runs straight!"

"I was only kidding," Phil protested. "My job now is to run the other fellow down if he is an outsider, and if I don't succeed, Rex, it won't be your fault after handing me this splendid layout. Who is my neighbor on my right?"

"Lucian. It is just an office, you see. very much like Cliff's, but I think he will find any little help he may need in his work here."

The room with its books of reference, bottles of acids and magnifying glasses was in truth not unlike the one on the other side of Phil's, but in place of the weighing machines stood an easel to hold paintings of doubtful origin while they were being tested, and teakwood cases for the repository of ceramics.

But Lucian Baynes scarcely saw them; a certain shelf of books had caught his eye and he was oblivious to all else.

"Bracaloni on intaglios!" he murmured in an almost awe-struck voice. "Where under the heavens did you find that monograph, Rex? I ransacked Italy for it! And surely—surely that is a first edition of the third volume of Hokusai's Mangwa! I had understood that there were only three known to be left in the world!"

"It is reputed to be the real thing, but only you can tell that, old man," Powell replied. "Come now, and see George's study, and then we'll go to lunch while Miss Jepson gets out those circulars."

But Lucian felt not the slightest interest in George's apartment nor in the prospect of food, and they were finally obliged to leave him there alone, poring with the most absorbed interest over a huge and musty tome on emeralds.

"Can you beat it?" whispered Phil as they entered the last of the offices which radiated from the main one. "If he is out of stir in his old age he'll be curator in some museum! What in the world—Going to hold séances here, George, old boy?"

The last room, windowless like that from which they had just come, was dimly lighted by braziers swung from the ceiling. A throne or dais of dull, glimmering metallic stuffs faced them against the opposite wall, while in a darkened corner stood the incongrous but familiar cabinet of the medium's delight. The ebony center table was a small, quaintly carved affair and upon it, on a cushion of black velvet rested a huge crystal which glowed with a shimmering, opalescent radiance like some gigantic soap-bubble.

"Rex, the beard of the prophet has descended upon you!" gasped George as he stared about him. "With such an atmosphere I could drag secrets out of the Sphinx herself! If I only had had it in Peoria! But what's behind that curtain?"

Smilingly, Rex Powell advanced to it and drew it aside, disclosing a plain office door of mahogany and frosted glass.

"It leads into the main corridor," he explained. "Yours is the only room which has a separate entrance from the outer office. I thought it advisable in the event that it became necessary to examine possible witnesses under the influence of psychic suggestion, as it were, that your sanctum should seem to have no connection with The Shadowers, Inc., next door."

George approached the table upon which the crystal rested and felt carefully down one of its legs. Then he straightened himself and a significant smile broke over his lean countenance.

"All the latest improvements," he murmured. "Brother, bring on your suspects!"

The circulars went their way and The Shadowers, Inc., waited expectantly, but no client presented himself at their office. Henry Corliss, reveling in his chemical laboratory, was as blissfully content as were Lucian Baynes with his books on jewels and Clifford Nichols in his scientific study of the basic forms of chirography; an art which

in his case had heretofore been strictly home developed.

But Philip Howe's active brain and agile fingers were alike beginning to chafe under the inaction, and when he read in the papers of the robbery of a certain "safe" deposit vault, and recognized in the description of the outrage the unmistakable handiwork of two of his old-time associates, he began to ask himself disgustedly why he had fallen for this fantastic scheme.

George Roper wore a more lugubrious air than ever, and even the leader of the new enterprise began to lose heart, although he would not admit it even to himself.

The days lengthened into a fortnight and early one sultry August morning, as they all sat together in Rex Powell's six-sided sanctum, Philip remarked:

"Say, Rex, we haven't had even a sign of a case yet, so you could hardly say that we had started in business. Couldn't I just go out and hunt up some of the live ones and turn one little trick? You know, I could go and work up trade for you!" he added brightly.

"Say the word and to-morrow I'll bring you such a bunch of some nervous old lady's sparklers that you'll have her visiting card chased down here by the butler within an hour. You can monkey around for a few days and then return them to her and get the reward. What's fairer than that?

"She'll recommend her friends, too, and that will start the ball rolling. As long as restitution and not prosecution is your aim, I don't mind being the goat."

Powell shook his head.

"This is not a new kind of graft, but a legitimate business," he reminded his eager confrère. "We must wait until work comes to us in a legitimate way."

"I might at least do some legitimate business," George sighed. "What with the credulous populace seething about us and all that gorgeous paraphernalia in there going to waste I could clean up, as our young friend Phil would say. If you would listen to me, Rex, and let me put that mystic Indian sign on my door—"

"And hang an Indian sign on the whole concern." Clifford Nichols interrupted, yawning behind his hand. "Really, Rex—"

But Rex Powell stopped him with a gesture. He was listening intently to something which had escaped their ears, and all at once he touched the invisible spring beneath the edge of his desk.

Instantly a well-modulated girlish voice came to them, clear but trembling, with some all but overwhelming emotion.

"Oh, are any of the gentlemen who call themselves the Shadowers in? My mother received one of their notes and I—I have brought her card. Something terrible has happened out at our house!"

CHAPTER V.

A MATTER OF PSYCHOLOGY.

SILENTLY George arose from his chair and with one hand thrust in the breast of his tightly buttoned, funeral coat he made a profound obeisance toward the panel which led to the outer office, but Rex motioned him impatiently to his seat once more and at that instant a faint ticking sound reached their ears to mingle with Miss Jepson's reply.

"Card, please? One of our experts will call immediately."

"Oh, but—but could I not bring him back in the car with me?" The clear, troubled voice went on. "You see, mother wanted me to explain a little before he got there. It is all so dreadful, and we daren't even call a doctor!"

In the inner office Lucian uttered a low exclamation and all but Rex followed his gaze to the place from which the ticking sound came. Close beside the panel a tiny slit, like those in a slot machine, had appeared in what seemed to be the solid wall and through it a narrow ribbon of paper was unwinding itself rapidly.

Lucian glanced toward their leader and at a nod from the latter, he moved over to the slit, and taking up the strip of paper he read the message to the end as though glancing over a stock report. Then, as the part which issued now from the aperture was blank he tore off the first length and spread it out on the table. Upon it in small typed characters they read:

"Swell flapper scared stiff been crying

trying to be up stage but lost her nerve smart clothes thrown on anyhow only one glove pumps don't match guess about twenty name on card Mrs. Horace Punderford."

They gazed questioningly at Rex as the unique description impressed itself upon them, but the voice of Miss Jepson came once more.

"Well, it isn't usual, but I'll see if the head of the firm will talk to you."

"Oh, please do! Tell him we will pay anything if he will only be—be discreet as he promised in the note, and will help us out of this awful affair!"

The ticker had run and stopped again and as before Lucian tore off the strip and brought it to the table.

"Going to cry I'll get what dope I can and phone."

Then the voice of the indefatigable Miss Jepson:

"It's really against the rules. I have instructions not to bother him if the case is a trivial one—"

"Trivial?" The soft voice, sobbing now. "When m-my father has gone insane and the s-safe is open and there's a d-dead—But I can't tell you; I mustn't. P-please tell the h-head of the firm that I m-must see him."

The circle about the table gripped the arms of their chairs and stared at one another with relaxed jaws.

"The safe!" muttered Phil in an ecstasy. "Lead me to it!"

The telephone at Rex's elbow whirred and as he lifted the receiver Miss Jepson announced in a highly artificial tone:

"There is a young lady here with a card from Mrs. Horace Punderford, sir. She says that Mrs. Punderford received one of our notes and that the matter is urgent. The young lady wishes to consult you personally now."

"Mrs. Punderford? Wait till I consult our files, Miss Jepson. I will call you."

Then while the others gaped at their leader they were suddenly plunged into darkness which was slowly superseded by a soft glow like sunlight through rose-colored curtains. From a drawer in the lower section of the filing case Rex drew a rose-colored cloth of some silky material and flung it over the sombre table.

The Spanish leather screen in the corner, turned about, revealed a delicate tapestry of downy clouds and dainty shepherdesses and from behind it Rex brought forth a tall, slender vase containing some cherry blossoms, so perfect that one could have sworn they were real. This he placed upon the table and moving swiftly about the room turned the gloomy, dull-toned prints with their faces to the wall upon which they hung.

In their places smiling landscapes and sunny water scenes appeared, and in a thrice the office was changed from that of a rather sumptuous but depressing consulting room to a charming apartment where the most highly strung woman might find repose of spirit.

His companions had followed his maneuvers in wordless astonishment, but Lucian could contain himself no longer.

"Wonderful, Rex! I don't quite gather the reason for this transformation, but just these few touches have made all the difference in the world! Jove, it looks like a lady's bower!"

"Some quick-change artist!" Phil supplemented. "What's the big idea, Rex?"

The magician who had performed the miracle turned to his confrères with a low laugh.

"I'm just applying a little of George's psychology only in a slightly different manner," he explained. "There is a young girl outside, agitated, in deep trouble and distrustful perhaps of us. If she walked into a stiff, awe-inspiring cold office with an atmosphere of impersonal professionalism would it not daunt her spirit, cause her to become embarrassed and make her still more reluctant to give her confidence?

"As it is her eyes light upon things of beauty and charm, reassuringly feminine touches here and there, and a soothing sense of peace and mental ease and well-being will steal insensibly over her perturbed mind in this soft, rosy glow."

"It's got my psychology beaten a mile," George asseverated. "Whatever put such an idea into your head? It's immense!"

"When I was planning this organization

I realized that the type of people who would become our clients would not be of the general run; that although they came voluntarily they would come reluctantly, distrustfully, fearing notoriety above all things and determined not to give us any more information than was absolutely necessary in their eyes. In other words, they would be cautious, self-conscious, tense, and laboring under the stress of deep emotion, whether anger, fear, grief or vengeance.

"I worked out a scheme of the different main types into which people of the class I sought for clients might be divided, and the sort of atmosphere which would be most conducive to confidence from them. I then arranged that this room might by a few simple changes such as you have just seen, be made into a psychologically perfect atmosphere for each of them, and I depend upon Miss Jepson's description, as you have also seen, to guide me in my choice of scenic effect.

"Now," Rex added in a changed tone: "There is a table in each of your studies. If you haven't discovered it yet, look for the little spring concealed beneath the edge; press it, and you will be able to hear all that is said in here."

"But what is that ticker business?" demanded George. "If that isn't like the old pool-room days—!"

"Haven't time to explain now but Miss Jepson holds a tiny, noiseless keyboard concealed upon her lap, and types off with one hand her personal impressions of the prospective client. The reel of paper is automatically wound out through that aperture in the wall to me.

"I told her to put her impressions in her own words and I find them illuminating. But go each of you to your own study and listen and wait. If I need your actual presence a buzzer will sound."

Scarcely had they vanished through the several panels when Rex took up the receiver once more.

"I am disengaged now, Miss Jepson. Will you show the young lady in, please?"

The panel leading to the outer office slid aside disclosing a slender girl whose youth was as obvious as her breeding. She was clad all in white, yet no whiter were her garments than the little face which must have been undeniably pretty under normal circumstances.

Now her light brown hair was disordered and her soft, blue eyes were swollen and glittered with unshed tears. There was a hint of firmness in the little square chin but at the moment of her appearance her lips were trembling wofully.

Then all at once the Shadowers in their various offices had a remarkable demonstration of the soundness of their leader's psychology. The girl halted, her eyes widened with wonder as they roved about the room, a hint of color crept into her pale cheeks and her lips broke into a wavering smile.

"Why how—how lovely!" she breathed. "I—I never thought—! Oh, what a *darling* screen!"

As she silenced herself in swift confusion Rex rose.

"Come in." He smiled encouragingly and pushed forward a low chair. "Mrs. Horace Punderford sent you, I believe?"

She nodded, wetting her lips with the tip of her small pink tongue.

"She is my mother. I—I was terribly afraid to come here at first but it doesn't seem at all dreadful now. The atmosphere here—why, it's almost like my own room at home. The girl paused and then added: "Terrible things happened at our home last night! Terrible mysterious things for which no one can account!"

"Why did your mother not communicate with us immediately?" asked Rex.

"She—she didn't know what to do! We were all distracted, nearly as insane as my poor father seems to have become! It was only toward morning that she remembered your card, Mr. ——?"

"Powell," Rex supplied. "Please tell me what these terrible things were which occurred at your home, Miss Punderford."

"Oh, can't I tell you in the car? It is waiting outside and every moment is precious! I—I know you are the head of the firm, but we need the very best help that we can obtain, and if you cannot render it to us, no one can!

"We must have absolute secrecy: I don't quite understand why, but mother will ex-

plain that to you, and—and she would give almost all we possess to have this terrible affair hushed up and the mystery of it all solved."

"The question of terms can be arranged later, and I am quite willing to accompany you, Miss Punderford, but I do not work alone. We have experts in every line of possible investigation, criminal or otherwise, and I must decide who to bring with me." Rex paused. "Just tell me the main events which occurred last night without detail and I shall know what to do."

CHAPTER VI.

WHILE THE LIGHTS WERE OUT.

THE girl sat silent for a minute biting her lips and then the words came in a little rush.

"My father went suddenly mad and began raving like a maniac, poor Aunt Selina has had a stroke or something, father's safe has been robbed and there is a man—a stranger—lying dead on the library floor! He must have been one of the burglars, I think, although I only caught one glimpse of him before Alan dragged me away!"

"But my dear Miss Punderford, tell me the sequence of events!" Rex himself was staggered by the strange, incoherent story. "Your father perhaps discovered that the safe had been robbed and the shock—?"

Miss Punderford shook her head.

"It all happened at once," she replied, "while the lights were out."

"During the night, you mean?" Rex persisted. "Or had the electricity been short-circuited in some way?"

"No. We were holding a séance. Aunt Selina is a spiritualist, and mother and father are getting to be, too. We were all holding hands around the dining-room table in the dark when all at once there came a sound of something falling in the library. I don't know who turned the lights on again, but it was then that Aunt Selina became insensible and father began to rave and—and we found the body."

"What has become of it?"

"Oh, it is still there! Mother insisted on locking the library and refused to call the police or even a doctor for father, he was saying such queer, awful things! But something must be done at once, of course, or the servants, faithful as they are to us, may learn what has occurred and tell.

"Your mother locked the library without stopping to find out what had been taken from the safe, Miss Punderford?"

"Oh, yes, but I don't think father kept anything of value there. That is the odd part of it. All his securities and things were down-town at his office."

"Your car is not a limousine, surely, at this time of year?" Rex shot the seemingly irrelevant question at her and the girl eyed him for a moment in surprise before she replied:

"No. It is an open touring car."

"Does your chauffeur know everything that occurred last night?"

"Heavens, no! None of the servants know a thing about the—the library or why it is locked. They think it was a séance which frightened poor father and Aunt Selina into fits, and although they are steady, matter-of-fact people who have been in our employ for ages, they are very badly frightened, too. I shouldn't wonder if the cook, at least, gives notice. But what made you ask about the chauffeur, Mr. Powell?"

"To impress upon you the fact that nothing save the séance itself and a few casual questions I may put to you must be discussed in the car. I think I have learned enough facts concerning the burglary to go upon until I can obtain a detailed statement from Mrs. Punderford."

Rex pressed three buttons rapidly on his desk.

"Have you room in my car for three of my associates as well as ourselves?" he queried.

"Oh, yes. It is a seven passenger—"

She paused as three panels opened unexpectedly and three gentlemen of widely different types appeared.

"Miss Punderford, may I present Doctor Corliss? He will diagnose the cases of your father and aunt, examine the body in the library and dispose of it without publicity, if the man's death was a natural one and your mother requests its private removal.

"This gentleman is Mr. Howe, our expert on safes, and Mr. Roper is a special investigator. We will accompany Miss Punderford to her home, and I would suggest that you take her down to the car, while I leave a few instructions here."

Scarcely had they departed when Lucian Baynes stalked into the consulting room tweaking his small blond mustache with an injured air.

"I say that was confoundedly mean of you, old chap! I heard the girl say that the car was a seven passenger. Why can't we all be in at the death?"

"Because there is nothing in your line connected with the case, Luce, as far as we know yet." Rex pressed a button which started the buzzer in Clifford's study. "If anything turns up concerning jewels or papers which may have been stolen from the safe I will send for you both at once—Cliff," he turned as that individual sauntered in and pretended to be oblivious to the look of reproach cast upon him, "please get out the files for me like a good fellow and look up Punderford, so that you can give me a line on him if it is necessary for me to send for you.

"There is something listed about every one of the thousand men and women we sent those circulars to. And be prepared for a message from me at any moment. This look as though it were going to be *some* case!"

Leaving two very much disgruntled colleagues behind Rex passed through the panel to the outer office and ascertained from the card left with Ethel Jepson that the Punderford residence was on the upper Drive. He evaded the young woman's eager questions with a hasty laughing rejoinder and descended to the waiting car.

Miss Punderford greeted him with a little cry of impatience.

"Oh, I thought that you were never coming!" she exclaimed. "Please forgive me, but mother will be almost beside herself. You see, she made a point of insisting that all our guests of last night should remain until you or some one from your firm should come, and I am afraid that Audrey is going to be rather nasty about it. She is a dear, but then last night's horrors upset her nerves frightfully, and she and mother had quite a scene because—"

She paused in sudden confusion with a quick glance toward the chauffeur.

"Who is 'Audrey,' Miss Punderford?" Rex asked. "Tell us who your guests were last evening, please."

"Audrey is Mrs. Audrey Fraser. I had forgotten that you did not know." The girl had regained a little of her composure and she spoke in a more steady, formal tone. "She came with Mr. Stephen Leacraft for dinner and to attend the séance. They are both old friends of ours. Mr. Goodhue was there, too."

A faint blush spread over her pale face at the mention of the last name and Philip nudged Rex significantly as they swayed with the swiftly moving car.

"These three were the only persons present except the immediate members of your family?" Rex coldly ignored his irrepressible associate.

"Oh, there was a friend of father's who is staying with us, Mr. Scaynes. He is very much interested in spiritualism and table levitation and all that sort of thing. He's quite old."

"Was it he who arranged for the séance last evening, my child?" George Roper's tones were blandly paternal, but a peculiar light had dawned in his eyes.

"He and Aunt Selina together, I believe. I don't know much about such things and since last night I never want to hear about then again as long as I live!"

There was a trace of hysteria in her voice once more, and Rex asked hastily:

"Your family consists only of your father, mother, aunt and yourself?"

Miss Punderford nodded.

"That is all since my brother died. Mother believes she is receiving messages from him."

"And the household servants?"

"We have only a few with us; the rest are down at our country home on Long Island. You see we ran in town for a fortnight so that father could have his eyes treated. He has had a great deal of trouble with them lately and the doctor thought that an immediate operation might be necessary if they did not respond to treatment.

But I have not answered your question, Mr. Powell.

"Mickens the butler is with us, of course, and the cook and kitchenmaid and housemaid. Fortunately my mother's personal maid Mona came yesterday with some things which had been forgotten, for she was a great help to us all last night. Williams," she nodded toward the chauffeur's stolid, impersonal back which was presented to them, "sleeps over the garage, and his family are down at the Long Island place."

Remembering Powell's warning, she had lowered her voice and now silence fell upon them until they had swept in at a pair of square stone gate-posts and under a spacious porte-cochere.

A pompous, elderly man in the conventional black of the house-servant held the door already open for them and as Miss Punderford alighted, she asked anxiously:

"Any change, Mickens?"

"No, miss." The butler coughed deprecatingly and eyed the strangers somewhat askance. "Mrs. Punderford requests that you go immediately up-stairs, miss. She will see the gentlemen at once in the drawing-room."

He accepted their hats and would have taken possession of the small black bag which "Dr." Corliss bore, but the latter clung to it tenaciously:

"Never mind that, my man," he announced. "I am a physician, and it contains some remedies which must not be jarred."

"Quite so, sir." Mickens threw open the doors of the drawing-room with markedly added respect. "Mrs. Punderford will receive you in a moment."

From force of habit Philip Howe glanced about him with professional interest, but Rex drew George aside.

"We'll divide this up," he announced rapidly. "You interview this man Scaynes while Henry is examining the body in the library and trying to discover what the trouble is with the aunt and Punderford himself. All this after we have listened to Mrs. Punderford's story, of course."

"I understand," George responded. "Phil's job is the safe exclusively, but I feel that Mr. Scaynes is my meat."

There was time for no more, for a slow dragging step sounded upon the stairs and the drawing-room curtains parted. A tall, majestic-looking woman stood before them, her manner a curious mixture of hauteur and appeal. Her iron-gray hair rose in immaculate waves from her forehead, but no amount of cosmetics, however skilfully applied could mask the drawn tragic look upon her face, and she clung to the curtain for a moment as though to brace herself for the coming interview.

The next instant her hand fell to her side and she advanced.

"My daughter tells me that the head of your firm himself has come to my assistance in this crisis," she observed, glancing from one to another of them. "May I ask which—?"

"I am Mr. Powell, Mrs. Punderford, and very much at your service." Rex introduced his colleagues and added: "Your daughter has given us a list of your household and the guests you entertained last night; she has also told us enough of what occurred to bring us swiftly here.

"Other of our colleagues may be summoned as they are required, but now we should like to have a detailed statement from you so that we may start our investigation at once. I need not repeat the assurance given in the little note which was sent to you of our absolute discretion, and the fact that nothing shall reach the authorities except by your own command."

"Thank you, Mr. Powell." She seated herself and motioned them to chairs.

"I fear that I can give you a scarcely more coherent account of what occurred than my daughter's must have been, for it was all so sudden and coming as it did at a moment when we were keyed up to the highest pitch of emotional excitement made the full horror all the more poignant.

"It must have been about eleven o'clock when we left the drawing-room here and going to the dining-room seated ourselves about the table and holding each other's hands in an unbroken chain strove to concentrate our minds to receive any message which might come to us. My husband, my sister Miss Hornbottle, our guest Mr. Scaynes and myself are all devout believers

in spiritualism and we have had many manifestations from those who have passed on, but last night there seemed to be evil influences at work, and we could obtain no result."

She gazed at her auditors half defiantly, and George Roper spoke in soothing, sympathetic tones.

"I am told that is frequently the case when skeptics are in the circle. The lights were out, of course?"

Mrs. Punderford assented with a gesture.

"Who turned them out, if I may ask?" It was Rex who put the question.

"Mildred, my daughter. She sat nearest the switch. We must have been seated there tense and wrought up to the most sensitive mental state for twenty minutes or more when a queer, choking cry came to us from the direction of the library, which opens from the dining-room. We were paralyzed for a moment, and then there came the sound of a heavy fall, not violent, but as though some one had gradually sunk down, relaxed.

"That broke the tension, and Mr. Scaynes sprang up and turned on the lights just as my sister screamed and slipped from her chair, insensible. My daughter cried out and Alan—young Mr. Goodhue—stopped to comfort her, but Mr. Leacraft, Mr. Scaynes and my husband went into the library to discover what had fallen.

"Audrey—Mrs. Fraser—was aiding me in my efforts to revive my sister, and in my anxiety for her I was preoccupied to the extent that I did not hear what was taking place in the library until my husband suddenly gave a strange cry and flung his hands up and out before him as though he were trying to force something back. At least that was his attitude when I reached the library door. Then I saw that his safe was open and a man's body lay as if collapsed upon the floor near one of the French windows which lead to a narrow balcony.

"This window was open and just before it was a small black bag, its contents—which consisted of a collection of steel tools—scattered all about. I advanced to approach him, but Mr. Scaynes drew me back. At that instant I heard a hideous, raucous cry behind me, more like that of a wild beast than a human being!"

Mrs. Punderford paused, shuddering, and when she spoke again her voice was shaken and very low.

"I turned to find that the strange sound had issued from my husband's lips. Mr. Leacraft was holding him, but he was struggling fearfully, and one look at his face showed me the appalling truth. He had gone mad!"

CHAPTER VII.

DEVIL'S WORK.

"ARE you sure, Mrs. Punderford?" Rex asked quickly. "Might it not have been just a momentary frenzy of rage at finding that he had been robbed?"

She shook her head, but a slight change had come over her face and her eyes narrowed as if in swift caution.

"There was foam upon his lips and he kept flinging out his arms as though into immeasurable space and then turning them so that his hands were thrown palms outward and drawing them back in an indescribable way almost as if some one or something were forcing them back.

"His eyes looked strange and dilated with fear and horror. He was not looking at the—the safe, but into space, and he did not know me or any of us!"

"Was his gesture something like this, madam?" In the excitement of his interest Henry had risen from his chair and his plump arms were working in a manner which would have been comic under less tense circumstances. "You say he seemed at first to be flinging his arms out into space; was he not rather appearing to be reaching out after something which eluded him?"

"My poor husband's crazed gesture may have been something like that. I cannot find words to describe it other than I have used, and I was naturally all but distraught at the moment, Dr. Corliss.

"He was assisted to his room by Mr. Leacraft and Mr. Scaynes while I drew myself together sufficiently to quiet the perturbation of the butler, who had appeared

at the foot of the staircase, and dismiss him for the night."

"And then you locked the door of the library, Mrs. Punderford?" suggested George Roper significantly.

Mrs. Punderford flushed slightly.

"I wanted time to think what to do to avoid the almost inevitable scandal and notoriety which must ensue." She nodded. "It was only during the later hours of the night that I recalled your note and decided to put the case in your hands.

"I returned to the library to find that my daughter had recovered from her hysteria and with Mr. Goodhue's assistance Mrs. Fraser and I succeeded in getting my unconscious sister to her room, where she has remained in a comatose condition ever since, in spite of all our efforts to arouse her."

"Your husband, is he still suffering from his seeming delusions?" asked Henry.

"No. Toward morning he fell into a heavy sleep from which he has not awakened yet. If you would care to see him now—"

"I think, since both the patients are unconscious for the present, I would prefer to make my examination of the body in the library first," Henry interrupted smoothly. "You are quite sure that nothing has been disturbed there?"

"Quite," Mrs. Punderford responded, her lips tightening once more as if the suggestion were for some reason unwelcome, but she rose promptly. "I have the key here and I will show you the way."

It was Rex Powell who held out a deferentially detaining hand.

"Just a moment, Mrs. Punderford. Have you informed any of your guests yet as to who we are or why we are here?"

"No one knows but my daughter, not even the servants." She gazed wonderingly at him.

"Then, not only for your better protection against gossip and possible scandal, but because it is the only way our organization works, we prefer to be known in other than our true characters. In fact, it is only under this condition that we can accept the case."

The others gazed at him in no less wonder, for it was the first they had heard of this decision of their leader, but Mrs. Punderford gestured helplessly.

"But how can that possibly be arranged, Mr. Powell? I have detained my dinner guests of last evening, some of them unwillingly, until your arrival simply in order that you may question them.

"Then there is our house guest, Mr. Scaynes. He will be sure to observe you at your investigation, to say nothing of the servants!"

"Our special investigator here, Mr. Roper, can interview any one of your guests whom he may choose without arousing their suspicions, if you will present him as one of your husband's old-time business friends, for whom you have sent because of his sudden illness," Rex responded easily. "Your own doctor may have been called out of town on an unexpected case and have sent our Dr. Corliss, which would account for his presence.

"If you can slip him, Mr. Howe and myself into the library now, we can remain there until your guests have departed. I understand that one of them, Mrs. Fraser, is anxious to leave in order to catch a train. I shall be able to manage the servants without arousing their suspicions or their learning too much."

"But Mr. Scaynes?" Mrs. Punderford queried. "One cannot summarily eject a house guest of weeks' standing—"

"He could be requested to go upon an urgent errand for you; to your husband's attorney, perhaps, or better still, out to your country place on Long Island in your car for some important papers which he will not be able to find there." Rex was smiling now. "That will give us time to complete our investigation here and be off before his return."

"I should like to meet them all before their departure," George remarked. "A few words, alone or collectively, with them are all that I shall require for the moment. You can, of course, give me their addresses should it be necessary for me to interview them later."

"We-ell, I presume that can be managed, and I promised to place the case absolutely in your hands," Mrs. Punderford replied,

somewhat doubtfully. "I will return and present them to you at once."

She led the way and Rex, Henry and Phil Howe filed out in her wake.

George pursued the vanishing quartette with an oddly quizzical gaze. Mrs. Punderford's explanation of the locked library door had plainly been a mere subterfuge—to use his own mental colloquialism, she was "holding out on them"——and if he could not learn the truth from one of her guests he meant to wring the inner facts from that lady herself if he had to resort to a psychological third degree more seaching than any to which he had subjected his gullible clients in the days when he practised fake spiritualism.

And here, too, lay his present client's weakness. He did not make the mistake of underrating her intelligence or well-poised self-control, but her predilection for spiritualism might be turned to good account if the necessity arose.

An inspiration came to him and he arose and went to the desk telephone which he had descried in a shadowed corner of the huge drawing-room.

Lifting the receiver cautiously he gave the number of "The Shadowers" headquarters.

In an incredibly short space of time the matter-of-fact tones of Ethel Jepson came to him over the wire.

"Ethel, this is Mr. Roper speaking. I want you to go into my study and look under the skull—"

"Me?" The interruption came with emphasis. "Excuse me, Mr. Roper, but I ain't exactly pinin' to fondle that thing."

"I didn't ask you to touch it, my dear child." A dry chuckle emanated from George's usually solemn lips. "I mean, look in the stand beneath it and you will find a small collection of books. Take out two of them; one is a list of gentlemen who were in my former profession, a small green leather volume. The other is a still smaller one bound in black cloth and labeled 'Code.' Do you know what a 'code' is, Ethel?"

"Something like a puzzle?" she replied quickly. "I'll say I do! I never worked one, but I'll tackle it if you say so! What's the stunt?"

"Take down quickly the seven letters I am going to give you." He spoke with a lack of hesitation borne of long practice. "S-E-O-U-E-H-S. Got that? Repeat it, please. Yes, that's correct. Now look up code number three in the little book and see if you can dope out what those letters mean.

"It won't sound like anything to you, but see if you can find the resulting word in the other book. If you can, ring me up here and let me know what it says in connection with that word. Better ring me up even if you fail, and tell me."

"I'll do that little thing, Mr. Roper. Anything else?"

"No. Good-by."

He rang off, wondering if he should have trusted the harum-scarum bit of femininity at the office in this emergency. If she were clever enough to work out the code without the key, and could apply it, the truth at the immediate moment would be invaluable to him.

His meditations were interrupted by the reentrance of Mrs. Punderford. She was accompanied by a slender, red-haired woman in her early thirties, the curve of whose lips and latent twinkle in her blue eyes suggested a sense of humor, albeit of a cynical, worldly sort.

They were followed by a well-built man of about forty, with prematurely graying hair and the affable manner of a prosperous business man. Behind them, in the doorway, a slender youth had paused.

"Audrey, may I present Horace's old friend Mr. Roper. Mrs. Fraser, Mr Leacraft, Mr. Goodhue; Mr. Roper." Mrs. Punderford announced glibly. "Mr. Roper is almost as anxious about Horace as I am, and I am sure you will be willing to give him the details of what happened last night; I was too agitated to tell him more than the merest outline."

"I am sorry to trouble you about this terrible thing," George began apologetically as soon as their hostess had departed. "But what I was able to gather from Luella seemed so mysterious, so awful, that I felt for poor Horace's sake I must know all about it. I should like to help them both if I could."

"It was devil's work, Mr. Roper, if you ask me!" Young Alan Goodhue had advanced from the doorway.

CHAPTER VIII.

GEORGE PLAYS THE LEAD.

"NONSENSE!" Mrs. Fraser retorted crisply. "Mrs. Punderford told you of the séance, did she not, Mr. Roper? Miss Hornbottle was all wrought up by it—she believes in that sort of thing implicitly, you know—and it is my opinion that she has been simply frightened out of her wits.

"A burglary is not an unprecedented occurrence even in the best regulated of families, and personally I see nothing mysterious about the whole affair except Mr. Punderford's seizure, if you choose to call it that. No doubt a medical examination will disclose the cause of it."

"Why was a physician not summoned before this?" George asked of the others in general, but again it was the lady who replied.

"I haven't the least idea." Her eyes were as blandly inscrutable as those of a cat. "We suggested sending for one, of course, but if you are an old friend of the family, you will realize that Mrs. Punderford is a rather dominant person and she wouldn't hear of it. I fancy she supposed that her sister was merely in a faint and Mr. Punderford beside himself because of the burglary. There is really nothing more that I can tell you."

"And I have been detaining you!" George spoke with well-simulated remorse. "I know that you must make your train—"

"My train has gone." The lady shrugged. "In any event I have given up my trip. Last night's scene has unnerved me too much for traveling.

"I don't mean the séance; that was merely ridiculous. But the hideous interruption, the discovery of the burglary and the effect upon Miss Hornbottle and Mr. Punderford! It was positively harrowing!"

"Then, if you have time, will you tell me about it, please?" George insisted.

"Oh, we sat there in the dark around the dining-room table holding hands in the most idiotic manner when that noise came from the library and somebody switched on the lights just as Miss Hornbottle fainted. I went to her assistance naturally, and I was too busy attending to her to note anything that went on in the library until Mr. Punderford cried out in that dreadful way, and then Mr. Leacraft and Mr. Scaynes carried him out raving between them. Then Mrs. Punderford came out and locked the library door—"

"Now, I wonder why she did that?" George interrupted meditatively, as if to himself.

"Really, Mr. Roper, you will have to ask her that question." Mrs. Fraser shrugged again. "Perhaps the safe was still open and she didn't wholly trust the servants, Mr. Leacraft can tell you what went on in the library.

"If you will excuse me now I think I will go home. Please tell Mrs. Punderford to let me know if there is anything I can do for her in her trouble. I shall remain in town indefinitely and I shall hope to hear from her."

When the adieus had been said and Mrs. Fraser left the room George turned to the elder of the two men who had not yet spoken save to acknowledge the introduction, and asked for his version of the affair.

Mr. Leacraft spoke in a hearty, frank tone, and his description of the séance and its abrupt termination differed in no way from the others. It was evident that he, too, held the same views on spiritualism as those of Mrs. Fraser, and looked upon the experiment of the evening more in the light of a joke than anything else.

"Really, Mr. Roper," he remarked in evident extenuation of his attitude, "I don't mean any disrespect to my hostess's opinion, but I am a broker, and although we occasionally entertain hunches on the market, I can scarcely accredit them to the spirit world! To tell you the truth, I was getting confoundedly bored with the whole proceeding when that sound of a cry and a falling body came and Scaynes switched on the light."

"You and he were the first to reach the library, were you not?" George recognized

the type of man with whom he had to deal and came to the point without preamble.

"I fancy Punderford was ahead of us; he sat nearest the door. As I crossed the threshold I saw that the safe was open, and he was staring down into it, but my eye was caught by the chap lying on the floor over by the window—must have been the burglar, of course, or one of them, for his kit of tools lay beside him, and although he was lying on his back, you couldn't see his face, because his arms were over it.

"I think he must have been young, however, for his cap had fallen or been pushed off the back of his head, and his hair was brown and curly. I noticed that much as I started toward him, but Scaynes passed me and a queer, choking sound from Punderford made me pause. It was an odd sort of cry and as he uttered it Mrs. Punderford rushed in, saw the body and approached it, but Scaynes drew her back and then poor old Punderford went mad!

"I don't know what else to call it; he raved for hours, but you couldn't make anything out of what he said. At least it didn't seem to have any possible connection with the robbery; the poor old boy seemed to be in sheer terror, but of what or whom it was impossible to tell."

"What were his words? Can you recall any of them, Mr. Leacraft?"

"Well, I can't imagine what he was trying to get at, and in a way he seemed to be contradicting himself for at one moment he would cry out—'Take them away! Oh, God, take them away'—and the horror and fear in his voice was like nothing I have ever heard before!" Stephen Leacraft shivered. "Gad, it was enough to unnerve a chap just to listen to him! Then he would mutter:

"'They're receding. They're opening out! I can't even feel them. What does it mean?' That was when he would stretch out his arms and he seemed to have the strength of ten men; it was all Scaynes and I could do to hold him down in bed.

"With the very next breath he would draw his arms back and scream: 'They're crushing me! I can't breathe!' That is all I can remember, but it is pretty average incoherent, don't you think?"

"Holy—" George caught himself up hastily in his first unguarded slip and passed his handkerchief across his face. He emerged from behind it as urbane and inscrutable as ever.

"Extremely incoherent, my dear Mr. Leacraft, but one never can tell what form delirium, brought on by sudden shock, will take. My poor old friend! I can only hope that this attack will be but a passing seizure.

"I have heard him mention the safe here at home frequently, but I was under the impression that he kept merely family trinkets in it; I know for a fact that his securities and more valuable documents are in his office. Have you any idea what the safe in the library here contains?"

Mr. Leacraft raised his eyebrows slightly.

"I have never heard it discussed, Mr. Roper," he responded. "Mrs. Punderford will doubtless tell you when she is more calm."

Before George could reply the telephone in the corner buzzed softly, and he rose in a haste scarcely in keeping with his air of magisterial dignity.

"If you will pardon me, I think that is for me. I am expecting a message—" He strode over to the instrument and as he removed the receiver a clear young voice came to him in gaminesque derision."

"That you, Mr. Roper? Say, I could do puzzles like that when I was a kid! I got the name, all right, but he ain't on your private social register."

"Are you sure that you did get the—er—word that I sent you correctly?" George spoke anxiously, but in a guarded tone.

"I'll say I did! Code three is just the one sentence about a ghost walkin', isn't it? 'One who has passed on is among us.' It didn't mean anything to me at first except a shiver down my back, but I knew there must be some comeback to it, so I began counting the letters and when I found out that there were just twenty-six in the whole sentence the rest was easy! I put 'A' under 'O,' 'B' under 'N,' and the rest of it down the line of the whole alphabet, then picked out the letters you sent me—"

"That's enough!" George interrupted

when she paused to take a breath. "You have done very well, very well, indeed, but —er—good—"

"Oh, you needn't worry!" Ethel announced serenely. "Maybe you didn't take the trouble to find out when you called me that that wire you're talkin' on is a private one, but I did! Good-by."

The perspiration was starting on George's brow as he turned back to Stephen Leacraft and took up the conversation at the point where it had been broken off. That bright little devil had solved the code all right, but what if the others had heard her shrill, young voice?

"As you say, Mr. Leacraft, Mrs. Punderford will undoubtedly enlighten me. She will have to take an inventory and check off what is missing, of course, before the authorities come—that is, providing that she knows the contents of the safe herself," George observed. "I gathered from the charming lady who has just left us, Mrs. Fraser, that she herself has not been informed of the body which was found in the library?"

"No. She was unnerved enough by the burglary and what immediately ensued without being told of that hideous discovery, and then, too, Mrs. Punderford had enjoined us all to silence. We felt obliged to humor her because of her distraught condition, although we may possibly be compounding a felony, or accessories after the fact or whatever it is that the legal chaps call it.

"Mrs. Punderford told her daughter and Miss Punderford told Mr. Goodhue, here, I believe"—he paused, smiling at the young man who reddened slightly—"but aside from us no one knows except Mr. Scaynes, who was in the library with us, you know."

"I don't think I know Mr. Scaynes," George spoke reflectively. "I've heard Horace speak of him often, though. He must be a mighty interesting man."

Even though his tone was slow and drawling, the man who had worked a shell game in the side show of a country circus in his early days had lost nothing of his lightning-quickness of vision and while his mild eyes appeared to be looking meditatively down at his long, slender, interlocked fingers he had darted one swift, keen glance at the face of Stephen Leacraft and noted the frown which passed over it at mention of the man Scaynes.

"If you are Mrs. Punderford's adviser in this crisis, Mr. Roper, cannot you persuade her to send for the police at once?" Leacraft asked irrelevantly. "With that man lying murdered—or dead, anyway—in there all these hours she is placing herself and every one who was present in a desperately awkward position."

"Oh, I don't know," George demurred. "It could easily be explained that every one's attention had been centered on the safe and no one had noticed the body over in the corner, but the authorities must be informed now, of course. I will try to make Luella see the importance of it.

"She tells me that her first thought last night was to avoid the notoriety of it, for her guests as well as herself, but now she must be calm and collected enough to realize that something must be done at once. Why do you say 'murdered,' Mr. Leacraft?"

The question came so suddenly and in such a change of tone that for a moment the other hesitated.

"Well, I don't know exactly," he admitted frankly at last. "There was something in the pose of the body, something tense and strained. We had no time to examine it; we were up all night with Mr. Punderford, you know. I suppose I took it for granted that the scoundrel's accomplice, if he had one, had killed him; it didn't occur to me that a burglar, like any one else, might die naturally and suddenly in the pursuit of his profession."

"We will have to look into this," George said gravely as he rose. "I won't keep you any longer, Mr. Leacraft. You will think me a tiresome old amateur detective, but I felt that I had to get all the details if I were to be of any help to Luella."

"Not at all." Leacraft held out his hand. "I should like to be of service myself. Look me up at the office whenever you like—you'll find me in the phone-book—and we'll talk the case over. So long, Alan. Don't forget to tell your father about those deeds."

As his footsteps echoed down the hall, denuded of rugs for the summer, Alan Goodhue leaned forward suddenly in his chair.

"What do you make of it, sir?" he demanded.

"I don't know," George responded truthfully enough. "I can't make heads or tails of it. You remained in the dining-room, did you not, with Miss Punderford?"

The young man nodded.

"Yes, but she caught a glimpse of the body in there and she was awfully frightened, and then Miss Hornbottle had to faint—I wish *I* had got a peep into that library!" he added wistfully.

"Mr. Punderford must have had something in that safe that the thieves knew about, but I've often heard Mrs. Punderford say that it was unsightly and ask him to have it removed as long as he never kept anything of value in it. What do you suppose killed that chap they found in there?"

"We will know when the police come."

George turned toward the door. It was evident from the young man's questions that he knew nothing which could be of use in the investigation and moreover George had caught the flirt of a dainty summer skirt as it passed down the hall and fancied that Mildred was waiting for Alan.

He must reach her first and warn her of the status of himself and his colleagues in the house. "If you will excuse me a moment—"

He found her standing in a curtained recess near one of the tall windows and at first he thought she was alone, but as he drew nearer he saw that she was talking to a tall, slender, dark man who turned slowly at his approach.

He would have no opportunity of warning her and George's spirits sank, but at her first words he realized that she had already been informed.

"Mr. Scaynes, this is Mr. Roper, father's old friend, of whom I have just been telling you—Uncle George," she added. "This is Mr. Scaynes."

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.

HER ANSWER

BY MARGARET G. HAYS

I WHISPERED that I loved her,
I asked her would she wed;
She coldly turned away from me,
And shook her pretty head.

Upon my knees I begged her,
"Pray do not blight my life;
I simply could not stand it,
Without you—for my wife."

But "No," she answered clearly;
I sadly turned away,
"There's no use pleading, drearly,
"Good-by, my love, for ay."

Two soft arms stole about my neck,
Joy that was almost cruel:
"Sometimes," she murmured, "no means yes,
You dear, big *April Fool!*"

Nan Russell: Investigatrix

by

Raymond Lester

IV—AN AFFAIR OF DIPLOMACY

"NOW," said Mr. Paddington, taking off his glasses and polishing them vigorously, "we can go ahead. Kindly call Miss Russell, and we will put her in charge of the Warren case."

"Righto, chief!"

With the air of one who performs a pleasing duty, Michael Paxton, junior partner of the private detective agency, rose briskly from his chair and went personally to summon the firm's star operative.

There was a neat tablet of ivory buttons on Martin Paddington's desk, but the buzzers were not connected to Nan Russell's room. In spirit, if not by signed and witnessed documents of partnership, Nan was one of the firm, and if the chief elected to treat her with polished courtesy and consideration, there was no one to say him nay. Martin Paddington, for all his bearing of mild kindness, *was* the boss. In justice to Nan's likable disposition it should be mentioned that her small privileges created no discontent or jealousy among the other operatives.

All this is by way of stating that our Nan was the possessor of many winning, lovable characteristics; and proof, if needed, that there are luring qualities about her, aside from her cleverness as a detective, can be gathered from the expression of Michael Paxton's face as he ushers the girl into the chief's office.

Mickey's eyes and smile seemed to say: "Here she is. Isn't she the sweetest, most wonderful—" and so on in extravagant praise. In actual words, though, he said—just nothing at all. Business was the order of the moment, and when chairs were drawn close to Martin Paddington's desk, the head of the firm did most of the talking. As usual, he went straight to the point.

"Three days ago," commenced the chief. "Miss Peggy Warren reported the theft of a letter. We have made the usual investigations and can find no trace of it or any direct clue to the thief. Do you know the Warren family?"

"Yes. It is spelled with a capital F," said Nan. "Peggy is very wealthy; but the glory of her money is not greater than her pride of birth. The Warrens came over in the Mayflower and—"

"Exactly," interrupted Mr. Paddington. "There you have the crux of the whole situation. Peggy Warren, excepting for some remote cousins, is the only remaining representative of the family. The letter she alleges to have been stolen, is not only valuable as an historical document, but it contains some references to a long passed away Warren that reflect discredit on the good

name of the precious family. She fears two possibilities: the thief may try blackmail. or sell the letter to some collector of historical documents. The letter bears the signature of a statesman prominent in past history, and discloses a disgraceful act of treachery on the part of the ancestral Warren. A collector would pay upwards of five thousand dollars for it, and Peggy Warren has offered a reward of a like amount for the recovery of her letter."

" And there is no suspect?" asked Nan.

" Not of our finding," said the chief. " But Miss Warren has gone so far as to make private and direct accusation against a young man who we can find no reason at present to believe is the thief. His name is Carroll, Lawrence Carroll. He is an artist, and at the time the letter disappeared was engaged in painting Miss Warren's portrait. Our trouble is caused by the fact that although there is no evidence against Carroll, he appears to be the only person who could have stolen the letter."

" Has he a reason?" asked Nan. " Is he, like the majority of young painters, in need of money?"

" Carroll is as hard up as he can be without actually being in want," admitted the chief; " but beyond a certain carelessness in money matters, we can find nothing substantial against him. He does not gamble, drink or suffer from any particular weakness except a leaning toward quitting work at the slightest provocation. Nothing very unusual about that. What?"

" I could do with a day off myself," said Michael Paxton. " Wouldn't you prefer to be out in the woods gathering violets, and wandering through luscious meadows starred with—with—buttercups?"

Martin Paddington glared at his partner severely.

" We're considering an important case," he observed. " This is not the time to talk of slushy fields. Besides, you're seasonably 'way out in your rhapsodies. Wild violets are over, and the cows have eaten all the buttercups. What was I saying?"

" About Lawrence Carroll." suggested Nan. " You speak well of him and yet—"

" There does not appear to be another so likely to have stolen the letter. Peggy Warren makes definite accusation against him, but offers no proof that he took the letter. On the other hand, we cannot assert that he is innocent until we find out who did steal it. Progress is blocked until we are satisfied one way or the other concerning Carroll. As you can appreciate, the affair presents difficulties, and requires delicate handling. It is your mission to clear or bring the guilt home to Carroll, without allowing him to suspect that he is under observation."

" Then I shall have to take the part of a model looking for a job."

" A good idea," said the chief, " but Michael suggested a better. In fact, the way is already cleared for you. You are to have your portrait painted. Under the name of Muriel Adams an appointment has been made for you."

" When?"

" This afternoon. You are due at Carroll's studio at four o'clock."

" That will give me time to call first on Miss Warren."

" Wish you luck," muttered Michael Paxton. " She's a stuck up, insufferable little prig and—"

" A good client," put in Martin Paddington. " Don't forget, Mickey, that Miss Russell is fully capable of holding her own part and supporting the dignity of the firm. Five thousand dollars is quite a handsome remuneration and we can afford to be—"

" Diplomatic," suggested Nan.

" You will not have any trouble," said the chief, confidently, and his eyes twinkled as he looked across at his junior partner.

" You, Miss Nan, are not a handsome young man. You see," he went on, blandly ignoring Michael's frantic gestures for silence, " Miss Peggy Warren, notwithstanding her position of social eminence and wealth, is the type that fancies she has only to look at a man for the poor creature to fall down and worship her. She has flirtatious inclinations, and as Mickey wouldn't flirt, she snubbed him."

" Oh," said Nan, " what a dreadful hardship it must be to be as good-looking as Mr. Paxton."

Whereat the chief laughed, and Michael Paxton flushed a deeper red.

"I don't call that playing the game," he blurted as Nan went out of the office. "What did you want to tell her that for?"

"I thought it might help you in your siege on Miss Russell's affections," replied Martin Paddington with suspicious mildness.

"Yes, you did," retorted Michael Paxton. "Right now you're pulling my leg."

"Well, you've no need to kick. Nan Russell has a well developed sense of humor. One of these days she may take pity on you and remove you for all time from the danger of wily, designing damsels of the Warren breed. I have known quite nice girls to make even greater sacrifices. Suppose we now get on with the rest of the day's work. There has been altogether too much irrelevant talk."

The calmness of this assertion robbed Michael of the power of immediate rejoinder. Later, he bethought him of a suitable and very effective retort, but it is not much good coming back at a fellow two hours after the fireworks have fizzled out.

II.

"You are a detective?"

The surprise expressed by the question was allowable, inasmuch as Nan Russell, dainty in attire, clear of skin, and altogether too girlish looking, did not look the part of a professional sleuth; but Miss Warren's tone was supercilious, if not, insulting.

"A well bred, bad mannered little vixen," summarized Nan, as she smilingly surveyed the pretty, doll-like features of Peggy Warren. "It is my honorable calling," she said. "I have come to ask you a few necessary questions, and shall not detain you more than a few moments."

It is possible that the amiable Miss Warren felt inclined to sniff or adopt a loftier pinnacle of impertinence; but the look of quiet amusement in Nan's eyes quenched the impulse. Peggy did not feel quite sure that she could maintain an air of superiority with this good-looking and self-possessed girl, so—vulgarly speaking—the sole surviving member of the direct line of Warrens climbed down. She couldn't scratch, so she purred and graciously invited Nan to be seated.

"I have been given to understand that you have strong suspicions concerning a Mr. Lawrence Carroll. May I ask you if you have some information that will give me solid ground to work upon? Some item or circumstance that will justify my regarding him, *pro tem*, as a thief."

"I have no *proof*, if that is what you mean, Miss Russell," said Peggy with a vicious snap to her words. "But I most certainly believe that Lawrence Carroll stole my letter."

Nan's consideration of this statement was interrupted. The maid opened the door.

"Miss Natalie Clarke," she announced.

"Oh, tell her—" commenced Peggy Warren irritably, then as a figure appeared behind the maid, she jumped up and ran forward with prompt, gushing words of greeting. The usual empty phrases tripped with staccato rapidity from her tongue as she extended both hands to the tall, distinguished visitor.

With that instinct which is a ninety-nine per cent efficient guide to the general likability of people, Nan Russell felt an immediate liking for the stranger. In contrast, and enhanced by the flighty insincerities of Peggy, Natalie Clarke's womanliness shone forth with a steady glow, and Nan was surprised at the curiously searching glance given her by one no more than a casual stranger.

The brief conversation ensuing between Peggy and Natalie made Nan acquainted with the fact that Natalie Clarke had called by prearrangement. Peggy Warren was to accompany her on a visit, and although Peggy insisted that she would be ready in less than ten minutes, Natalie Clarke was firm in her refusal to wait.

"I have just remembered an important engagement out of town," she said in final excuse. "I have barely time enough to catch a train. I'll see you to-morrow."

Loud in her regrets and protestations, Peggy's manner changed directly the door closed on her visitor.

"After all," she said, shrugging her shoulders indifferently, "I'm glad she did not stay. A sweet creature, but she bores

me. Too serious for our set. Works! No need to, either. Plenty of money."

"Miss Clarke is a painter, is she not?" asked Nan. "The name is familiar to me in connection with some really remarkable landscapes I saw at the Guerdon gallery. Dainty, exquisite subjects. She is very clever."

Peggy Warren stifled a yawn. "Maybe," she said. "I don't know. Don't care for pictures."

"Yet you commissioned Lawrence Carroll to paint your portrait."

"Oh, that! Only a whim. I met him at some mixed social affair. It was a matter of charity more than anything. I heard he was as poor as a church mouse, so I gave him the opportunity to make a few hundred dollars."

"You have a kind heart," observed Nan with unperceived irony. "Did you sit at the studio or here?"

"Mostly at the studio. Carroll came here to make sketches for the background of my picture and—" Peggy Warren leaned forward and continued impressively: "Lawrence Carroll was the last person to see that letter. I remember now, distinctly, I showed him several of the family papers dating back over the last three centuries. After he had gone, I put them back in that cabinet over there. I missed the letter at once and communicated with your agency."

"You said nothing to Mr. Carroll?"

"Certainly not. I have told no one outside of yourself, Mr. Paddington and his young partner. If Lawrence Carroll knew that I had missed the letter, he might destroy it."

The chiming of a china clock on the old-fashioned mantel-shelf warned Nan that only an hour remained before she was due at the studio for her initial sitting for her portrait as Muriel Adams. But although she spent the next thirty minutes in a criss-cross series of questions she obtained no real satisfaction from Peggy.

According to Miss Warren, the affair was a plain, straightforward case of trapping—one person. It was fixed in her mind that Lawrence Carroll was a thief and, according to her, there was nothing to be done but force him to give up his booty.

"At all costs," she urged, "he must be prevented from selling it."

Meanwhile and about the time when Natalie Clarke left the brownstone Warren house, we will look in on Lawrence Carroll.

This young man was occupying a comfortable position on a divan; but his frame of mind did not at all coincide with his ease of body. Indeed, it may be said that he was badly rattled, and this, for one of Carroll's carefree temperament, is saying a great deal. As a rule he managed to get along and let his creditors do the worrying; but the letters scattered on the floor were altogether too emphatic and brutal in terseness to allow of further philandering over unpaid bills. He saw unpleasant visions.

"There's the landlord," thought Carroll. "The others can be put off for a week or so, but he doesn't have to wait and won't. I'll have to squeeze some cash out of somebody. I wonder if I dare tackle Peggy Warren. She ought to be good for a bit on account. I hate to write to her, but I must."

In pursuance of this resolve, Carroll levered himself off the divan, cleared a space on a table littered with books and sketches, and sat down to compose a difficult letter. It took him some time to frame the opening sentences, and he had not reached the foot of the first sheet of note-paper when a tap came to his door. Pushing the half-written letter aside, the young man bade his caller enter. He watched the door with gloom, but his expression changed to quick, smiling welcome when he saw that it was no dunning creditor who came to pester him.

"Natalie!" he cried. "Enter, thrice welcome angel. Why, it is days since you were last here. Over a week. Give an account of yourself. Where have you been, too?"

"I came, not to answer questions, but to ask them," said Natalie Clarke. "What have you been doing?"

"Same old thing. Muddling along."

"Painting pot-boiling portraits, I suppose," said Natalie, idly turning over the leaves of a sketch-book. "How are you getting on with Peggy Warren's picture?"

"Haven't done a thing to it this week. She hasn't been near the place."

"Is that why you look so glum?"

"You bet. The sooner I get it finished the sooner I get paid. It is all very well for you to talk of art for art's sake. You can afford to paint what you like, and how you like. Some day, when I clean up a good lump sum I'll be able to quit pot-boiling. Meanwhile the portraits pay the rent and keep me—in cigarettes. What's the matter?"

Natalie's dark eyes fixed on Carroll's face with strange intensity.

"N-nothing's the matter," she replied. "I was thinking, that was all. Wondering," she went on, throwing the sketch-book aside, "why you are content to wait around for the crumbs that fall from the rich man's table. It is degrading to have to depend upon the favor of your social connections for commissions and—"

"Hold on, Natalie. Not so fast," protested Carroll. "My reputation has spread beyond the narrow limits of the elect. Even as I speak, I hear the footfall of a new patron. Only this morning I received an urgent telephone message asking me to paint the portrait of a Miss Adams. She is due here at four and—"

"So you will become a fashionable painter, a flatterer of females, an attendant of pink teas, and deteriorate as an artist," said Natalie tartly.

Lawrence Carroll raised a cautioning hand and jerked his head in the direction of the door.

"It is she," he whispered. "Pray that she does not necessitate too great a strain on my powers of idealizing the features of a patroness and still retain a passable likeness."

A moment later, Lawrence Carroll had to admit to himself that Muriel Adams was no candidate for artistic jugglery. The texture and color of her hair would require no false, reflected lights to enhance its beauty. No magnification of her luminous, large gray eyes; no adjustment in the fine, straight line of her nose, or added curve to her lips would be needed. Muriel Adams, neé Nan Russell, would have been valuable as a hired model. Carroll congratulated himself that he would have ample opportunity to study her and at the same time get a good fee.

Pleasant thoughts these, and the artist was too absorbed in his new subject to note the peculiar behavior of Natalie Clarke. Following her first glance at Muriel Adams, Natalie abruptly turned her back.

In her character of Muriel Adams, Nan adopted a less decisive manner of speech and movement; but although her assumption of languidness remained undisturbed, she did not fail to take note of the wealthy, amateur painter's behavior. Had Natalie failed to recognize her as the same person she had so recently encountered at Peggy Warren's? Had she, at the inopportune moment of her entry to the Warren reception-room, overheard Peggy Warren's remark relating to Lawrence Carroll? If that were the case, Natalie was aware of Nan's duality of names and—

Assuring Lawrence Carroll that she would be quite content to leave the entire choice of posing her for her portrait to his good taste, Nan pondered the statement that Natalie had made when she had refused to wait for Peggy. Natalie had clearly and definitely stated she had an important, urgent engagement out of town. What, then, did her presence in Lawrence Carroll's studio imply? Was she the victim of an erratic temperament, or was there a more serious motive behind Natalie's actions?

"I like her," thought Nan, "but artist as she is, I am sure she is no creature of irresponsible whims and fancies. Her eyes are too steadfast, her mouth too firmly molded. She is a young woman who does not often act without thought, or on the spur of a groundless impulse. If she is pretending not to recognize me, and knows that I am posing under an assumed name, it is fair to argue that she did hear what Peggy Warren said, and came here to warn Carroll."

In face of these suppositions, Nan Russell was forced to admit that Carroll showed no signs of nervousness or suspicion of herself. Was he playing a deeper game than he appeared capable of?

"I think," suggested the portrait painter, standing off and surveying Nan with head tilted to one side, "I will make some quick studies of you in charcoal. We will then call Miss Clarke to act as jury and

help us decide which position shows you to best advantage. It is not often," added Carroll gracefully, "that I have a subject so worthy of careful, preliminary consideration."

With perfect composure, Natalie now came forward and met Nan's eyes with no hint of recognition.

"By all means," she agreed. "Meanwhile, Lawrence, you might look out a canvas for me while you are sketching; I will amuse myself with your paints. The novelty of watching you at work has lost its first, witching savor, and I cannot sit idle."

A spare canvas was soon found and Natalie Clarke seated herself at an easel at the far end of the studio. During the next hour, Nan posed in three positions, and Carroll made several rapid sketches in bold outline. At the conclusion of the sitting, he called to Natalie, and she declared in favor of a spirited study in profile.

"The others," she declared, "are too passive. They do not show the true spirit of Miss—Adams."

The slight hesitation before she pronounced the name, and the hint of challenge in Natalie's voice, apparently passed unnoticed by Carroll, but Nan mentally pigeonholed the circumstances for future analysis.

"And what," asked Lawrence Carroll, "have you perpetrated?"

"I have only succeeded in spoiling a good canvas and using up a quantity of your best oil colors. However, I'll make you a present of the result. You can keep it as a warning not to lend your brushes and paints to an amateur. No, thanks. I'll not stay for tea. I had a cup before I arrived. Order some for Miss Adams; I'm sure she must be tired after her long sitting."

A puzzled, partly anxious look came over Carroll's face as Natalie passed out of the studio. His invitation to Nan was perfunctory; but for reasons connected with her desire to stay in the place as long as possible, Nan accepted Carroll's half-hearted offer to ring up the studio restaurant.

During the wait, the girl wandered about with studied aimlessness. She came to a halt in front of the easel used by Natalie. The vivid sketch in color that Natalie had designated a failure, shone forth with arresting power.

"It is wonderful," she cried. "You don't know what you have been missing, Mr. Carroll. Come and see."

"It certainly is a little masterpiece!" exclaimed the artist. "Natalie Clarke couldn't make a rotten sketch if she tried."

With a gesture almost caressing in its gentleness Carroll held up the canvas.

"It is quite different to her usual style," said Nan.

Carroll turned and looked at the girl in faint surprise.

"You know something about art?" he asked.

"A little," admitted Nan. "I am not very strong on judgment of technique; but it is not difficult to see that this picture is carried out in a manner totally removed from her habitual manner. The pictures of Miss Clarke which I have seen at various exhibitions have been much quieter in treatment, more reposeful and delicate. Here, she seems to have put her paint on with heavier touch."

"Natalie has been experimenting with my palette knife," said Carroll. "All the same, she has earned the right to a place of distinction. I'll put this 'on the line.'"

According to his word, the artist removed one of his own pictures from the wall facing the chair where Nan Russell had sat, and hung Natalie's sketch where it could be seen without effort.

While he was thus engaged, Nan stood looking around and trying to place herself in the position of one who had something to hide. If Carroll had stolen the letter, where would he keep it? The girl's glance roamed hither and thither, missing nothing. Finally she bent over a low stool that stood by the easel, and disengaged from beneath a collection of paint tubes a sketch-book. Under the book she found a glove, and recognized it as one of a pair worn by Natalie.

"May I look through your sketches?" she asked, and ready permission being granted, Nan satisfied herself that the book contained no studies of landscapes. For the most part the pages of the book were covered with bits of interior decoration.

Toward the end of the book was a highly finished, careful study of a room. A bureau, old-fashioned and easily identified, occupied the center of the page.

"This is the sketch for the background for her portrait which Peggy Warren spoke of," thought Nan. "There is nothing in the book that could have been used by Natalie Clarke as a suggestion for her landscape. Yet, her glove was *under* the sketch book. That is proof that she carried it here from some other part of the studio. What for? It is clear that she and Carroll are old friends. Is there a closer tie between them. He seemed to be worried, downcast about her refusal to stay to tea. What was Natalie's motive for coming here? I feel sure that if she does not know for certain that I am a detective, she is doubtful about me. Could she for some reason have stolen the letter? Purloined it for reasons other than monetary gain! Women sometimes commit queer deeds."

For three days, Nan attended the studio, sat for her portrait, and with the patience of an André Fabre, studied the situation. Her main objective was the recovery of the letter; but she kept this in the background of her mind, and instead of poking and prying into corners, she sought for motives.

"Why," she asked herself, "had Peggy Warren been so ready to assert that Carroll was a thief? Did her petty little mind hold some spite against him? Was Lawrence Carroll worried about something besides his debts? What purpose had Natalie Clarke fulfilled? Why had she dashed off that landscape in so different a style?"

By a process of careful questioning of Carroll, and elimination of unessentials, Nan's jumbled ideas and theories crystallized and centered on the sketch. It hung directly in front of the chair where she posed, and, willy-nilly, the girl studied it.

At the conclusion of her third sitting, she took down the canvas from the wall, held it in different positions and viewed it from several angles.

"You seem to be quite taken with that sketch," said Carroll.

"I am," admitted the girl as she returned the canvas. "It fascinates me. I wonder if you would mind selling it?"

Lawrence Carroll threw back his head and laughed.

"It is unsigned," he said, "and has no market value."

"But would you sell it to me?" persisted Nan.

Again the artist laughed and treated the matter as a joke. "I value it for its artistic merit and—for sentimental reasons," he admitted at last. "I guess I would let it go for five hundred dollars. Even Judas had his price."

"The picture is mine, then," said Nan dispassionately, and taking the canvas from the wall, she reached for her hand-bag, and a moment later handed Carroll a check for the amount he had never imagined would materialize. He gasped and stared in stunned astonishment.

"You will find," said the girl, "that check is signed with a name probably unknown to you, but the draft will be honored at the bank."

Lawrence Carroll stared down at the check. "Nan Russell," he muttered. When he looked up, the girl was gone.

III.

"I HAVE come," said Nan, when she entered Martin Paddington's office, "to resign from any further official connection with the Peggy Warren case."

"The dickens you have!" exclaimed the chief. "Well, it is just as well, for Peggy herself has just phoned in that she will take the matter out of our hands if there are no definite results by to-night. We lose five thousand dollars, but it cannot be helped. I suppose you found the nut too tough to crack, eh? How did you finish up with Carroll?"

"I bought a picture from him."

The girl propped Natalie's landscape against her chief's telephone. Martin Paddington viewed the sketch with pursed lips.

"You certainly got your money's worth in paint," he observed. "I suppose you have come to the conclusion that Carroll is not guilty, and bought this as a douceur. What did you pay for it? Twenty dollars?"

"I gave my check for five hundred!"

"Five what!" Martin Paddington

jumped as if he had received a galvanic shock. "Mickey!" he exclaimed. "Come here and take a look at Miss Russell's first acquisition as a patron of the arts."

"It is not bad," said Michael Paxton.

"But the price!" expostulated the chief. "The crazy girl paid five hundred dollars for it!"

"On behalf of the firm, Mr. Paddington," said Nan.

Martin Paddington's eyes popped. "You don't say," he grunted. "May I ask if you are perfectly serious?"

"Oh, yes," replied Nan. "As I said, I paid five hundred dollars for it, but it is worth five thousand!"

Dead silence greeted this statement. Then the chief drew a deep breath, and his eyes resumed their wonted mildness.

"You have located the letter?" he asked quickly.

"I have," replied Nan, but there was no triumph, no pride of achievement in her voice.

"And you have discovered the thief?"

"I have found out who was responsible for its prolonged disappearance," she answered. "No one, so far as I can judge, was more responsible than Peggy Warren herself for the letter's removal from her house. She jumped to an unwarrantable conclusion, and paved the way for confusion and temptation. That is why I wish to sever my connection with the case."

"Explain," said Mr. Paddington gently. "You have done well so far. Allow me to judge whether, after all, you are not the one best suited to round up the affair. I can see your sympathies have been aroused, and you fear that some foolish person is likely to suffer. Possibly we can find some way of straightening things out."

IV.

Soon after Nan had gone off leaving Lawrence Carroll in bewildered possession of the five hundred undreamed of dollars he phoned Natalie and asked her to call. He had parted with her sketch, and his conscience pricked him. Before her arrival a special delivery letter was brought to his door.

The thin, scratchy caligraphy on the envelope advised him of the sender before he opened the letter.

"Peggy for a dollar," he murmured, and frowned when he read the short note. "It is a good thing I didn't write to her for an advance check on her portrait. Nasty little beast that she is. Throws me down without a word of explanation. Repudiates her commission, and declines to allow me to finish her portrait. Hello, Natalie! You're just in time to assist at a pot-boiler's setback. Read this charming missive."

Carroll extended the letter to Natalie.

"So!" she exclaimed, with a light of gladness in her eyes. "Your dream of marrying a wealthy young society bud vanishes."

"Rubbish!" retorted Carroll rudely. "I was only following her lead. All I wanted was the cash for her portrait. I had to have it; but much as I kotowed, and tried to keep her in good humor, she's let me down. Surely to goodness you didn't think I was serious with her. If you weren't so confoundedly well off, Natalie, I'd have said three words to you long ago."

"And what were they?" asked Natalie eagerly.

"*I—love—you.* Only *you*," blurted Carroll.

"Now you've said it I'm glad I did it," cried Natalie.

"Did what?"

"Hid the letter. Oh, I forgot. You don't know anything about what has been going on. You remember the day Miss Adams came to you? Well, I had just come from Peggy Warren's house. Quite by accident, I overheard her accuse you of stealing a letter. I came here to warn you."

"You thought I was a thief?"

"I did at first. I knew you were dreadfully hard pushed for money and—oh, well, never mind about that now. While we were talking I was trying to think how to tell you about Peggy's accusation, and I found the letter in your sketch book. I knew that it had fallen between the covers by accident, but—I did not say anything about it."

"What in the world for? Why did you keep silent?"

"Because—because I wanted to estrange

you from that designing, heartless Warren girl. It was wicked of me, Lawrence, but my—our happiness was at stake. Then Miss Adams arrived, and I recognized her as the girl Peggy had been talking to. Give me that awful landscape I painted while you were sketching her."

"*That!*" ejaculated Carroll. "I can't; I've sold it. Got five hundred dollars for it."

"You've sold it! For five hundred dollars! Are you insane?"

"I made the price jokingly. Miss Adams took the canvas and handed me a check before I could think straight. Believe me, Natalie, hard up as I was, I wouldn't have parted with it. I never thought she would take me at my word and pay so absurd a price. I'm awfully sorry, dear. Can't you forgive and believe that I was not so mercenary as to barter anything of yours?"

"It—it's not that!" gasped Natalie, covering her face with her hands. "You sold that wretched daub to—"

"A friend of the foolish. Sometimes detective and sometimes adjuster of badly muddled events," finished a quiet voice from behind them.

The eyes of Natalie and Carroll turned toward the door.

"Muriel Adams!" exclaimed Carroll.

"Nan Russell—detective," said Natalie in a faint whisper.

"Yes," said Nan. "Two in one. To-morrow, as Muriel Adams, I will come to have my final sitting for my portrait. This evening, it is Nan Russell who has to play her little part. I have my chief's permission to act unofficially."

"You have Peggy Warren's letter?" asked Natalie.

"Yes."

"How did you guess where it was?"

"It was not a matter of guesswork," replied Nan, smiling. "I found out quite a good deal about you, Mr. Carroll, and Miss Warren. From that I deduced the foolish advantage you took of an accident. Your motive, of course, was clear, and," added Nan quaintly, "to them who love much, much can be forgiven. It was clever of you to think of so good a hiding-place for the letter, but once I discovered a plausible motive, I began to look for real clues. I looked at your landscape with a purpose aside from a desire to probe its artistic merits, and turning it sidewise I saw the faint suggestion of a straight edge beneath the paint. It was only necessary then to hold the canvas against the light to perceive the deeper shadow cast by the letter you had painted over. The investigations already made by our office, backed by the emphatic assertions of a certain young lady, suggested Mr. Carroll as the only possible thief. My own judgment convinced me that it is rarely that an artist is criminally tainted, and starting on the hypothesis that the letter had fallen into Mr. Carroll's sketch book, I joined up the circumstances of your taking that book with you while you were at the easel, and also the sudden adoption of a very different style of painting. Now," Nan held out the letter to Natalie, "all that remains to be done, is for you to place this document where you found it."

Overwhelmed by the surety with which Nan Russell had outlined her actions, Natalie literally did what she was told. She even went so far as to place the letter between the same pages of the sketch book, and Nan as gravely took it and placed it in her hand-bag.

"I can now," she said as she backed smilingly away, "truthfully say that I *found* the letter in Mr. Carroll's sketch book, where it had fallen by accident. My only sin will be that of withholding some of the truth. To-morrow let us all have tea together and talk of the happy times you folks are going to have."

"A smart, clever girl, that!" exclaimed Carroll.

"Yes, and she's a dear," declared Natalie fervently.

In Martin Paddington's office there now hangs a mutilated canvas. In the center of it is a blank, rectangular space. It is an exhibit that testifies to Nan Russell's successful rounding up of an affair of diplomacy. In Mickey Paxton's bachelor apartment hangs another picture. It is Lawrence Carroll's portrait of Nan, and Mickey, faithful and patient still, has hopes that one day he will possess the real, living girl.

Oblivion

by Jeremy Lane

Author of "The Fragrant Web," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

ON the death of Clifford Eastney—of the Eastneys, of Eubury Court, London—Ellen, his American wife, found herself with her six-year-old daughter, Fentress, stranded in the Tarmoyan town of the Indian lowlands. Jaborshi, a half-caste solicitor for the London Eastneys, had seen to it that no funds reached her.

Penniless, she arrived in the port town of Kambir and later was led to "Molly's Place" by two of the latter's "ladies."

Jaborshi in the meantime had intercepted the little fortune which should have come to Ellen from her husband's will. In the interests of his new fortune, he had come to Kambir, where he came upon the little Fentress dancing to the tune of a street-fiddler. Jaborshi snatched up the child and escaped with her to Madras, where, in a villa on the outskirts of the town, he set up an establishment. Here Fentress grew into health and youthful beauty under the hungry eye of her evil abductor.

A few days after her sixteenth birthday, Jaborshi showed off the child to four mysterious visitors, but he declined their price for his prize. That same night Fentress was abducted by the four men and carried out to sea. As she came aboard the vessel she remarked an emblem of a black panther's head on the sail.

Eleen, in the meantime, after roaming the world in search of her lost child, had come to settle in a palace of degeneration, some four miles from Madras. Only the élite among sinners came to this place. Here she had come upon an American, an old man who had dropped from exhaustion just outside the palace gates. Before his death he entrusted to her "the yielded torch" and spoke of a journey she should make to "fair Tarmoya." Three days later she put to sea in a mysterious ship whose sail bore the emblem of a black panther.

Walking along a crowded city street, Flyer Miles Branglan was suddenly seized by two men, one of whom pressed his spine and then threw him into a closed car. Later it was explained, after he had undergone cruel torment, that he had been mistaken for one Nels Faulkner. Refusing the money compensation they offered, Miles demanded an explanation of the mystery. He was then invited to work with them if he accepted certain obligations.

Next day Branglan sat at the window-table of a certain restaurant with a skull of a cat before him. From the street came a greeting of a stranger by name of Ober. Later another stranger, seeing the gourdlike thing, entered and left a cash acknowledgment in the skull. Then the waiter led him into another wing of the place, where there was music and a young girl dancer, dressed as a gipsy, who spoke to him as "Dear Nels." Even the waiter seemed to share the secret As she floated away like a pale blossom, Branglan agreed to see her the next night.

CHAPTER VII.

SILVER NEEDLE.

THE rear way out was a tunnel of odors and green light, a floor that yielded like boards laid in a marsh. Two ladies with corrugated cheeks and carmine lips squeezed past the erstwhile ace, with the remark that he was headed the wrong way. Fully convinced of the truth of all that had been told him by Marriot, that slim, quiet man in the big house, Branglan was in haste to return there for more light.

At the top of the stairway that came out upon a side street a short, ill-fitted figure glanced across to him, and in the half-dark Branglan felt Ober's colorless eyes upon him.

"Some crust!" said Ober. "Who was the Christmas Spirit that gave you the money?"

"You don't need to know everything, Ober," growled Miles Branglan.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for March 27.

" Snagged him right off the street!" continued the little fleshless one in a scoffing form of hero worship.

" Don't try it," said Branglan, pressing along.

Ober hiccuped a laugh. " Me! Naw, that takes a dude. I'll stick to the window work. Just you keep the house plans comin' my way. I got no aspirations higher 'n some millionaire's second story."

" Where's Basty?"

" Oh, around. He's been hollerin' about you. Thought you was lost. He says the big house is goin' to grab you if you ain't greased."

" What does he know about it?"

Branglan's impatience was real. Ober shuffled alongside, replying: " Fact is, Basty is just natcherly a good business head—and he's 'fraid you'll never live to pay him back."

" Where is he now?" snarled Branglan.

" Don't know. I told him he'd git his money when yer luck rolled over. Prob'ly you was hookin' some in the West all last week—"

Some time ago Basty had handed a cash sum to Faulkner, as usual, in advance payment for a certain house plan. Thus far, value had not been received from Faulkner —no plan provided. Basty wanted his money back. Partnership was dissolving.

Ober never doubted he was talking to Nels Faulkner, especially when Branglan restrained an impulse of generosity toward the little rodent and handed him a quarter instead. It would not be like Faulkner to overpay his helpers. Branglan appreciated the information that one Basty was actively anxious for his money.

" Beat it now," said Branglan. " I'll want you at the rooms in an hour. You turn this corner, right here."

Ober was puzzled, inclined to be disgusted, but he obeyed. The mention of " the rooms " was Branglan's recent pick-up from the talk of the dancer. He watched the decrepit figure of his assistant slide down the street and nearly out of sight. His idea was to trail Ober and thus be led to the rooms and perhaps to a glimpse of Basty; meanwhile seeking opportunity to reach Marriot at the big dark house by telephone. He had been warned against the use of the wire, but this seemed urgent. Branglan moved after Ober, who was on his way to spend a quarter.

No skill was required to keep that dusty black cap in view, bobbing slowly ahead, down the river-smelling streets, behind the financial district.

Twice Branglan glanced back, but such pedestrians as he saw failed to verify any suspicion. Presently he had the sensation again, quite definitely. Ober had entered a bar, up ahead, so he was relieved of the shadowing for a few minutes. This was several blocks from the L-shaped café. On an impulse he turned into a doorway and began to climb a wooden stairs.

The gas jet burning sickly at the entrance gave no light strong enough to push back the gloom of the upper landing. Branglan heard human voices behind doors above him. Down at the street entrance the door opened for some one else. There were ascending steps—light, hesitant as if questioning, more expressive than words in the musty air. The ex-flier started down the stairs.

In the narrow shaft he brushed against the cloak. The person was subtly fragrant, her back turned to him, her face averted. Below the cloak he saw feet that he could not fail to remember.

He paused just here, touching her, and said: " I didn't know you were living here, too. On which floor?"

She regarded him. Her eyes were below his own. He was seeing better in the uncertain twilight. She had been running, and now leaned back against the plaster. The folds of her cloak slipped from lax fingers, disclosing the spangled bodice.

" This time, Nels, you got me cold," said the dancer.

" Worried about me, no doubt," sneered Branglan, as he guessed Nels Faulkner would have done.

" Yes, but you don't believe it. You seem different—less of the rough stuff. Did your trip in the West do you so much good, or are you sick?"

" Who told you I had been West? You didn't know that ten minutes ago. You and Basty will get all that's coming to you

—when I'm ready," said the counterfeit Faulkner.

Linking her with Basty was another guess. He was watching her face closely. He tried to inflect every syllable with insult, according to instructions. He studied the sensitiveness the girl could not conceal, though she smiled brazenly. Something came to him from her personality, a fairness deeper than the body. Her eyes seemed to create light. Under any other circumstances Branglan would have drawn back decently to inquire her wish and to wonder much concerning the girl within this mask of rouge, powder, cloak, and a scant bodice.

She swayed toward him. Marriot's coaching had omitted her—an unusual oversight, for she seemed to possess the inner knowledge of Faulkner's associates, and could scarcely be unknown to those at the big dark house. Branglan could get no clue to proper action. He dared not be himself, and to imitate his double was distinctly undesirable now. She was very close before him. Her left arm, a white ghost of beauty, touched his coat with lingering endearment. He refused to succumb.

"How cordial you are!" he laughed.

Then her right hand flashed out.

He saw no weapon. His parry was late. A needle snapped off in the lapel of his coat. He caught her wrist. She was in a low madness, knowing that the needle had failed to penetrate. He could scarcely hold her lithe strength.

She pulled him down toward the flickering gas over the doorway. He took her blows in his face and was able to pass one arm about her waist. From regions far overhead came cries of remonstrance and abuse at the disturbance upon the stairs. Branglan worked for the object still gripped in her right hand. The only punishment he delivered was to draw his arm tighter until she could not breathe.

"Let's have it," he repeated.

Unexpectedly again she whipped the small shiny thing in her hand against him. Now he forced it from her fingers—a narrow silver syringe with the stub of a needle in it.

The perfume of the dancer's hair was a subtler weapon. Branglan ceased to hug, but kept a grip upon her arm.

"I regret—" he began, then stopped.

The cloak was down, hampering her feet. She raised it with difficulty, having but one free hand, while her intended victim looked at the little poison pump.

"Concentrated sleep, I suppose. Aconite?"

She did not reply.

"My hide is too tough," he went on, trying to think his way clear, "but yours is different, delicate. This jagged tooth of a needle that remains will do as good a job on your arm."

She had taken her hazard, lost it, and Faulkner was about to kill her—so it seemed to the girl. She shut her eyes. There was no crying for mercy. But for Branglan, the memory of a moment ago, the warmth of her in his arms, her intense effort to disable him, made his gruffness a pretense that would have been transparent to the girl if she had opened her eyes.

"But I've got an idea," Branglan pursued. "I want you to go to the rooms, right now, just as you are. I'm not going to walk beside you, though I'll be close behind all the way—near enough to scratch if you show any foolishness. You and Basty are trying to double-cross me. That can't be done. Now walk. If you make a break, you'll get every drop in this souvenir. Hurry, they're coming down after us."

Blanched and shaken, she did not trust his reprieve. She drew the heavy cloak about her, lifting its hood over her smooth blond hair, and they went out into the night. The last glimpse of her face hurt him more than anything, for he perceived that she was living in a crisis of delayed death, her knowledge of the contents of the cylinder a torture, moment by moment, until the scratch should come. Branglan followed, rubbing his bruised face.

All need of tracing Ober was gone. There was now a far more interesting guide. He wondered why the stuff in his hand had been prepared to finish Faulkner. He recalled her previous trys at him, in the cellar café—the dear little caresses that had not

quite reached him. Faulkner's camp was evidently divided and deadly against itself.

Keeping a few paces behind the girl's white ankles, that now expressed quite indescribably the resignation of her mood, Branglan turned the corners and crossed the surface-car tracks. She did not glance back or attempt to break away. Nor did he know what he meant to do when she had led him to the rooms.

The skull enclosing a crumpled item of currency was still in his coat pocket. He was athirst for the explanations which perhaps the slender, quiet Mr. Marriot could give, but he was not in the least regretful that he had ventured. The night air was gratefully cool to his face.

She was going where rents are lowest and natural deaths the exception. City sounds, blending between this and other more open neighborhoods, came like moans from the house-fronts and blind walls. Human figures moved in a morose twilight, slowly, with the indirection of cats. The street was rather silent at moments.

The dancer disappeared. Branglan sped forward. She had turned to mount a wooden stairway that clung to the side of a two-story building. A blue globe of gaslight hung at the upper end of the slant like a moon from the inferno.

He nearly stumbled over an old man sitting on the bottom step. This bareheaded figure was blind, and Branglan considered him lucky in this, because of the surroundings, yet singularly unfortunate, for the old man could not see the girl, the hem of whose cloak had brushed his wasted shoulder. Now as Branglan passed, the blind man coughed uneasily, as if in objection to an unfamiliar step. But Branglan was half-way up to the blue globe.

Some of the steps were missing, others seemed about to divide from their ancient roots in the side of the house. There was no hand-rail, only a disconcerting pitch toward the void below. The blue-shadowed door at the landing had a peep-hole, which Branglan examined while trying the latch. Through it he could see nothing.

"Stand still!" he commanded through the panel. The door scraped inward.

She had struck a match, to light a candle. Perhaps the scratch would be worse in the dark. The place was but half furnished, a table, some kitchen chairs, a mattress upon the littered floor. He crossed the room to her. Even the smallest gain for Branglan was that he could find his way here again, alone. Nels Faulkner's secrets were yielding. The girl placed the candle upon the table and faced him.

"Please—" she said.

Branglan doubted if any man could strike through that word from her.

"Why did you try to get me?" he asked.

She glanced down, making no reply. Some one in an adjoining room struck a match, held it briefly, then threw it down. The girl turned, startled, and Branglan watched sharply across her shoulder into the half-open door of that room. Another match was scratched. This time a candle held the flame.

"Ask who's there," whispered Branglan.

"Hello, in there!" called the girl.

The candle was being brought to the doorway by the person in question. The steps shuffled. Branglan thought of Ober.

"Hello, Fentress!" came a dull voice.

The blond gipsy drew her breath suddenly, and stared.

Again the voice, "Where's everybody?"—an inane petulance from the figure who stopped in the doorway.

Branglan and the dancer looked at Nels Faulkner—no longer a whirlwind of misbehavior, but the bereft shell of a man, an entity peering out through filmy eyes. Something inhuman had happened to him. He was droning other words. Branglan was reminded vividly of the six unblinking stars that had begun this particular job upon himself.

The girl stepped back in terror, her eyes wide, lips trembling to the scream she could not breathe out. The mindless tongue of Faulkner went on monotonously:

"I lost my note from Dr. Verenz, and I thought maybe it was up here. What's the matter with you, Fentress? Are you dizzy? Who is that—"

The unfortunate came toward the girl, grasping. Her scream came—a long, piercing cry—and she crouched back.

Branglan met the shock of facing one so like, and so unlike, himself. The photograph last night had somewhat prepared him. He stepped forward and tripped the demented Faulkner, who thumped the floor and lay still. Limp arms blotted out the second candle. The first flame stood near Fentress, burning evenly.

"You can get away all right," Branglan said rapidly, "if you want to."

If this were treason, he didn't care. Small comfort he could supply to his lovely enemy.

She seemed lost between the two Faulkners, each a counterfeit of the one she knew. Flier Branglan hastened out under the blue globe and made three long, precarious leaps down to the sidewalk.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUR IMMEDIATE SUPERIOR.

GRATEFUL for the sidewalk under his feet once more, he ran along the street toward the brighter sections. In the vicinity of the all-inclusive restaurant he secured a cab. It was a mixed sensation to have deserted the enemy.

Minutes of that café returned to mind as the privacy of the vehicle gave him opportunity to reflect. The undercurrent of seriousness tried his patience, and the thought of the black-haired broker who had deposited currency in the little skull was heavy upon Branglan's conscience. He was piqued because he could not see ahead. His actions were darkest to himself. Yet his desire to know was urgent. He was fascinated by a hint of the unadvertised power of the thing whose agent he was, temporarily. And the contact with the girl, Fentress, was extra-real and memorable. He could still hear her scream.

Being candid with himself, he knew he might have considered joining the enemy, even in view of Faulkner's pitiable fate, for her sake. Her voice had the quality that would make a delectably insecure eminence of any man's throne, if she said "Please." The mere possibility of her being placed under those six unblinking eyes at the big dark house was a chilling thought. But he puzzled most over her attempt to jab him with that venomous needle.

Cautiously he fumbled at his coat lapel. The broken tip was still stuck there. Holding it in his fingers, he remembered the swift twisting fury of her body, and how his left arm had pinioned her. Pensively in the dim interior of the cab Branglan smiled, brushing her scented white powder from his sleeve.

Half an hour's transit brought him to the large house in which he had suffered last night. It was now about nine o'clock in the evening. The place was in darkness, the roof showing dimly above the range of trees that enclosed it.

He permitted his driver to continue beyond the estate. These were the suburban ends of boulevards and city streets that had assumed the peace and dignity of roads. At the next intersection the fare showed signs of life and had the car stopped. He got out before no particular landmark, paid and dismissed his driver, then walked back to the house.

The young plum-colored chauffeur—or, rather, just now, the butler—came to admit Branglan, and smiled. Branglan was very sure of his own purpose here.

The staircase was softly-illumined. He followed the announcement of his name by ascending the stairs to the room of the slender gray man of fifty, Marriot, the one who had reached the house in time to save him from receiving Faulkner's punishment. This gentleman arose from a broad table that was under a strong light. The lamp was at the same moment flicked out, quite absently, by his hand. Other lights in the room were high around the wall and gray shaded. Branglan felt as though he were in some antechamber of a church.

"I am glad you have come so soon, Lieutenant Branglan."

"Yes; I want to talk with you, Mr. Marriot."

"Please be seated. You will find some cigars at your right, if you care to smoke."

"That is the point exactly," exclaimed Miles Branglan. "You are long on details, and I do not know one essential fact about you."

The burden of the younger man's dissatisfaction was thus at once made known.

Marriot was looking at him gravely. "Did you experiment with the skull?"

Branglan nodded impatiently.

"Was it all falsehood on my part, and insanity, as you were inclined to think, or was it as I said it might be—if you were patient?"

"I didn't need to wait for it to work," replied Branglan. "The Faulkner gang seems to be all you said it was—even more. I saw Ober, poor devil. Talked about Basty. Met a certain dancer, too. Do you know anything about her?"

Marriot was startled a little, but he looked steadily at the young man opposite and said:

"What would you consider an essential fact about us?"

"Your business, and the motive in it. That light-haired girl. And Faulkner. First you catch me and start to drive me mad. That in itself deserves more frankness from you. I am not holding the mistake against you. Simply I must know. You offered me cash. Then, when I refuse, you say I pass the test of greed. But still I know nothing about you."

The slight man in the other chair nodded his head. The glow from the high small lamps was like moonlight upon his face—features that Branglan guessed had not attained their calmness in a day. Marriot was of a type naturally quick to wear out against the good and evil things of the world, anxious, unwilling to take rest, too sleepless a personality for comfort. But he was deliberately at ease, a studied poise that Branglan would have admired under other circumstances.

"Did you bring the head?"

"Yes. There's money in it."

"Suppose you tell me—"

"Will you favor me by answering my questions?" interrupted the younger man.

"I will not promise that," replied Marriot. "Perhaps you will choose to come with us. Your introduction was certainly most irregular. Much more than our apologies are due you from us. You may be fitted for the work. Its principles will become clearer to you as time goes on, but you may quit now, if you like, with all good will."

Branglan felt helpless. "Half an hour ago I saw Nels Faulkner. You diminished him so horribly that he can barely distinguish himself from me. I must know why you did that, or we stop here."

The tall young man's voice was quivering. He leaned forward and placed the gray skull of the cat upon the table. Then he added:

"I suppose you would do the same to a woman—"

Marriot held silent, and the moment was exceedingly strained between them. The flier arose from his chair. But Marriot remained staring down at the rug, and his voice seemed weary as he said:

"I am sorry. You have qualifications. I do not wonder at your lack of faith. It is not desired to misinform you, or play upon your credulity, or withhold facts necessary to your conscience, but the work would lose all its peculiar value and evaporate, if known publicly. Your sincerity must be well proven."

Still standing, Branglan said: "I'd like to believe in you, but, so far, the enemy looks better to me."

"You are unwilling, then, to make a report of your evening?"

The plum-colored one was at the door, signing to speak with Marriot, who arose and went to him. Branglan, to whom the interview was as good as closed, followed. He was chagrined. The adventure that had beckoned him was held within a solid wall of secrecy.

Another caller was entering the room—the familiar, forbidden figure of the dancer. She stared, not believing his reality. The soft lights of the room became starry in her eyes. Her steps faltered, and a breathless word parted her lips.

Branglan drew his eyes from her. A great fear caught him.

In a single darting move he closed the hall door against the plum-colored servant, then wheeled in a rush upon the slender man of fifty, whose hands were brushed aside. Branglan's arms crumpled Marriot like a straw man. His fingers were upon the throat.

"You've trapped her," he cried to the one who was suffering his strength. "She's your enemy, but not mine. Now you're going to get her out of the place before those six fire-eyes start making a helpless animal of her!"

It appeared that the ex-flier was able to enforce his request. Marriot writhed. Out in the hall, the butler was beating upon the door. The girl came beside Branglan and pulled at his sleeve. Her face was very grave and pleading.

"I am not the enemy," she said. "Please wait a moment. Mr. Marriot is my friend—as you are. I have been spying, just as Allen, our butler, tells me you have been. I did not know that Faulkner had a double, working *with* us. I've been away, out of touch. Now I have come to report, as you have."

Branglan heard and relaxed. Marriot slipped to the rug. The universe was rolling about, to find a new groove, all its girders buckling. Absently the young man who also had made a mistake gave Marriot a hand to aid him to his feet again. The glass of the transom was shattered. A face appeared there between two plum-colored arms whose hands directed weapons—both aimed at Branglan.

"No!" cried Fentress to the butler. She waved him down.

"Lieutenant," said Marriot with a sigh of personal readjustment after the assault, and the faintest of pale smiles, "you have ably defended our immediate superior. Allen, get down from the transon and sweep up the glass."

Branglan found that the girl could smile in a manner that did not remind him of the café.

"Thank you," she was saying; "you will be very valuable to us."

CHAPTER IX.

ANSWERS AND A STIPULATION.

"I DID not know," continued Fentress, "and they did not tell you of me because they thought I was in Denver trying to net Faulkner. But you have joined us since I went shadowing him."

"Well, I'm not sure about that," replied Branglan. "Things have been flitting too fast. I looked to Marriot for some facts. The things he hinted to me sounded like a fairy story. He permitted me to go out and see for myself, this evening. I carried a skull which he provided. A man put money in it, but I don't know why. Ober found me as Marriot said he might. You talked to me, and—I wasn't prepared."

He was fingering the broken end of a hollow silver needle. His eyes held an odd light. He added, looking toward her again: "This wouldn't come off." He was dusting at the rice powder on his sleeve.

Her eyes brightened, but not her voice. "I have not reported for days," she said. "Ober manages always to be in my neighborhood, and I knew from Faulkner before he went West that the phone wires in this house leak straight to Basty. Nor do we trust our postman. I could not come here for conference. There was no way for me to know that you, a counterfeit Faulkner, were in the field. The change in 'him' was very hard for me to understand to-night. I had lost him in the West, though I guessed he was coming this way. But after the—encounter—in the rooms an hour ago, I felt the necessity of coming in to report, even if Basty followed me."

"Do you think he did?"

"Yes."

Then she laughed faintly, the familiar misleading sound. Miles Branglan found himself upon a smoothly humming plane of life previously unknown to him. His days of merely observing and appreciating the world were ended again, quite as definitely and more to his taste than if a new war loomed ahead. He was not so anxious now for Marriot to prove extraordinary statements. He was leaving the side-lines to enter another game.

"Is he your father?" Branglan asked, meaning Marriot.

"No."

"What did he mean, that you were 'our immediate superior'?"

"Oh, we all work together," she replied, as if she had missed the point of his query.

"Won't you remain?" asked Marriot, coming nearer.

The young man had show a very faint indication of departing. "Yes, thanks," he decided.

"Suppose we draw up our chairs and talk things over," suggested the slender man of fifty, who had felt the airman's hands on his throat a moment ago. He smiled rather gamely at that impetuous assailant.

The youthful butler in his plum-colored suit left a heap of glass upon a dust-pan, and hastened to place a chair for the girl. She accepted his courtesy, drew her feet up under the cloak, and leaned back in the deep shadowy chair. Marriot's face had regained its normal color, not quite so ghostly. Then with these three, the young butler, Allen, forgetting to play the menial, pulled a chair into the circle for himself. Marriot was saying to Fentress:

"Lieutenant Branglan is dissatisfied because everything is not made plain to him. Glasby brought him here quite by mistake, and punishment was begun upon him. But I had found Faulkner in Kansas City. I was disappointed not to find you with him, or near at hand."

"He outguessed me," she admitted.

Marriot continued: "I brought him here in time to correct the error. Of course, Glasby is wilted with regret at his mistake, which was in this instance very easily made. Branglan, aside from an extreme curiosity, seems to hold nothing against us."

The girl turned from the speaker to look at Branglan. And he, an individual of action and travel and sophistication, began to color slightly, finding with something of surprise that he was not the unamazable connoisseur he had fancied himself to be, but rather a lonely person in his twenties, oppressed now by his earlier deeds and contentment. He said: "I'd like to be let in, but of course—"

"Don't be afraid that I may say too much," she said, "particularly while Mr. Marriot and Mr. Allen are in the room. They know how to be perfect extinguishers of conversation."

Marriot's eyes lighted in a manner almost friendly. "What is your first question?"

Branglan asked: "If you were holding the real Nels Faulkner here in this house this evening when I went out to dinner, why did you turn him loose, even after his punishment? Wasn't it likely that he would go where I was pretending to be himself, and—embarrass me?"

The slender gray man was nodding. "Glasby went out to find you, warn you, bring you in. You hadn't been away from here an hour. Fentress, too, would have known if we had guessed she was in town. But we were forced to let Faulkner go free, even though the need to hold him was most urgent. One thing we are really afraid of: the police and their methods—not the law, but the police.

"In his last visits to this house before he openly broke faith with us, Faulkner protected himself by posting his own men in the shrubbery and hedges. Since he disappeared, his spies continue to trouble us. We dare not telephone, and we have had reason to beware the mail-carrier. The men in the hedges have seen you come and go.

"When we carried you from the car up the steps, perhaps they were watching. Half an hour later, this proceeding was repeated—Faulkner again carried in, helpless. This duality puzzled the spying eyes. Our avoidance of the police is known to Faulkner's men. We were not entirely surprised to receive to-night, just after you had gone, a message from your right-hand man, Basty, threatening us with a police visit if you were not released from this house at once.

"Basty had not seen you go away, or possibly he had seen you and was not satisfied that you were Faulkner. Perhaps he knew he had us cornered, as we had cornered you. He struck our weak point.

"Is it clear to you that we are few, and that no personal risk stands in the way of protecting the group? It was impossible to hold Faulkner. I did not rely upon Basty's honor in withholding the police, whether or not Faulkner was set free, but I think Faulkner's condition is a warning to his helpers. At least, we have gained a few more hours' residence here—and no police."

The room was silent. Branglan tried to fill in the gaps of the story, and get its

wider bearing. He was aware that much centered upon himself. He thought very soberly of the mindless look in the face of his double. The blond dancer seemed to sense this, for she said:

"That punishment is horrible!"

"I have a personal reason for sympathizing with Nels Faulkner," remarked Branglan.

Fentress turned to Marriot: "If you had not come in time, last night—" She paused.

Young Mr. Allen was smiling like a brother. Marriot seemed to comprehend her, and said: "No; that area of the brain can be brought into normal life again, after treatment."

Fentress shivered. The butler said: "It's clear to me that Basty is laughing at us. He has seen two Faulkners. We're on the run, and he knows it."

Marriot objected to so much certainty on this point. "The resemblance is close, and the real Faulkner is changed now. Branglan is more like Faulkner than Faulkner is like himself."

Branglan asked: "Who is this Basty?"

The girl answered him. "The man who influenced Faulkner to trick us, I think. Basty formerly worked in a lithographing shop, but Faulkner, after making visits in our name, would sell the plans of the houses to Basty. I've had three difficult talks with him. I guess he trailed me here; at least I saw him outside the house. Neither he nor Faulkner knew I had any relation to the group they were betraying. My coming here now has given Basty all the information he needs. He knows I have been a spy upon him."

Branglan nodded, and asked further: "You have not told me what unusual sin Nels Faulkner committed to deserve such a penalty." She did not speak, and he shifted to the slight gray man, who bowed his head and explained:

"In the long history of our group, this fate came only to one other person. For any misdemeanor of passion or offense that may be dealt with by a court, we merely expel the one who makes the mistake. But Faulkner has been cutting into the very life-roots of our work."

"That is not very intelligible to me," said Flier Branglan. "I'd hesitate a long while before burning out a man's memory." He was puzzling over the apparent inconsistency that the girl was their leader, yet she seemed shocked to meet Faulkner in his punished condition.

Fentress was holding very still, and, like Allen, studying the rug. Marriot spoke again. "From your view-point I must agree with you. My suggestion just now is that you give us your word, formally, as you did informally and in part this afternoon, to keep secret all that may be disclosed to you, and then, whether or not you choose to labor with us, you have a right to know something of our endeavor."

Branglan felt himself getting closer. The suggestion from the elder man seemed really to come as an order from the girl. "You mean that I remain free to do and to think as I please, except never to talk of what you tell me?"

Unthinkingly, he had addressed Fentress instead of Marriot, and she said, "Yes."

An electric buzzer rattled faintly outside the door. The plum-liveried Mr. Allen arose with a bored expression, then grinned at Branglan before assuming the subhuman countenance of a butler as he left the room. Marriot called to him: "We'll wait for you to come back."

And in a few seconds Allen did return, not in the least a house-servant, but fully himself. Behind him was the stocky man with the brief gray mustache—Glasby, the first of this mysterious camp whom Branglan had contacted. Immediately Mr. Glasby gave the essence of his report to the girl. "Dr. Verenz is in the city."

The name meant to Branglan only a feeling of magnetic readiness in those about him. The girl nodded. The gray figure in the other chair said calmly: "Sit down with us, Glasby, unless there is haste needed. Branglan, who has been successful in his experiments, is about to honor us with his promise of secrecy."

Glasby perceived without explanation the first importance of this newcomer's vow to the group. He simply said to the flier: "I was hunting for you—again."

Branglan glanced at the girl, but realized

that she was doing her best not to influence him further. The group of which she was a central figure needed him. He was annoyed. The big Why of it all was missing.

Even without the presence of the blond pseudo-gipsy and the recollection that less than two hours ago she had tried to jab him with poison, also that only a few minutes since he himself had done his best to strangle Marriot, Branglan would have desired keenly to pass within the portals of this concealed organization. But with Fentress in the next chair, the soft light magic about her head, the upper fold of the cloak unsteady with her breathing to give the lie to her indifference, he was certain.

"All the conditions are not for you to state," he said, and there was a firmness in his voice. "I believe you may have something real and right. At present I'm not connected anywhere. I'll give you my word, since you make a point of that. But you must agree to restore Nels Faulkner, fix him up to normal again."

Marriot, Allen, and Glasby were manifestly displeased—a small matter to Branglan, who found a light in the girl's eyes. Very slightly Fentress nodded her head. His stipulation was approved by his immediate superior.

The two older men were dubious, almost stubborn. Allen wanted to talk. Fentress said to these three: "Just a moment—" They bowed to her wish, and moved away, showing the first trace of formality Branglan had seen.

CHAPTER X.

THE THREAD OF TRADITION.

LEAVING these two together near the table, the plum-colored butler, the heavy man with gray mustache, and the frail one of fifty withdrew to a window-seat across the room. Branglan's impatience subsided. He felt arrived. She was watching him; she had sustained his wish; she had overruled her associates on his account.

Yet she was making no weighty utterance. He caught the subtlety of her idea—a further test of him—to see how he carried himself in the glow of arrival, real or fancied. Perhaps this flattering incident was to vivisect him. He had a notion now that the three men were more closely in harmony with her than would appear in this case. Their clockwork was faultless. He was doubly on guard against his own fatuousness. He must take nothing for granted.

Fentress was saying: "I should not have screamed so, when Faulkner strolled into the room with his lighted candle, but I was unprepared for two of him. He disappeared when our proof against him became positive. I have been combing the West for him, with only one glimpse of him in Denver. He has a gift for seeming to dissolve. That was the reason I was so glad to see you to-night. It is part of our tradition that such a penalty can be inflicted; it was our common understanding that Faulkner should receive this; yet it is so pitiable!"

"I liked your scream," said Branglan, "though I regretted to run away from you."

"Yes; I could not understand why you told me to escape if I wanted to. Especially since I have been so vicious toward you. That was not like Nels Faulkner. In fact, I do not comprehend your motive even now."

She glanced at him, pretending to be very solemn. Branglan had the feeling that she penetrated to all his motives. He hastened to ask:

"Besides my verifying Marriot's statements, what reason did he have—the inside reason—for sending me out to-night with the cat's head? I could not resist trying out his fairy tales. I suppose he is in charge while you are away—"

"You were strengthening Faulkner's leadership by daring to expose the head so openly. Nels has done other nervy turns that held his men to him like slaves. But more than that, I think, Marriot wished you to become familiar with your new personality in public. How did you make your mouth resemble Faulkner's? It is not that way now."

"I had his photograph to work from," Branglan replied. "Marriot told me that

if any one asked hard questions, taking for granted that I was Faulkner, I need make no reply, but show a bad temper. I tried to scold you in that lower room."

"I haven't danced there for a week," she said. "Faulkner often met his helpers down there. That's why I went to the lower room in the first place."

"I wanted to remain and watch you," he told her candidly, "but I was alarmed because you knew me and I didn't know you."

"I confess," she said, "that I had the little needle pump when I passed your table. I've been waiting to use it. The real Faulkner would probably have reached out for my arm."

"Would he?" said Branglan, who was rather darkened interiorly by this revelation of his double's habit. "Then what?"

"He would have grown very tired and sleepy from the scratch. As his friend, I should have insisted upon calling a taxicab and taking him to a hospital—of course, to bring him here without delay and, if he was still alive, turn him over to my superior."

"Running all the risks in the world," commented Branglan. "But you seem more merciful than that."

"You'll be better able to judge of our mercy when you understand our interests," she said. "You have a human reaction, and you're not too intolerant. Shall we all go up-stairs and receive your obligation?"

"As you will," he said quite humbly. "I can't rest until I know." Flier Branglan conveyed to her that it would be a serious matter for him to be disappointed about the nature of her business.

She called to the committee of three at the far window. Marriot said in a mollified way:

"We need you urgently, whatever your price."

He was taken into the darkness of an upper room of the house. Fentress had crossed the threshold ahead of them and was lighting a candle. Behind him waited the three. All remained standing in the heavy shadows.

As Fentress turned to him, he saw upon an altar or pedestal the head of a black panther, its great steadfast eyes burning like sulfur stars. Its stiff whiskers seemed alive and twitching to locate the strange personality in the room. Outside the curtained windows, rubbing against the walls, the tops of trees purred in the night.

Quietly, in the dusk of the room, Fentress was speaking to him.

"The panther is not an object of devotion, but it is a symbol of strength and beauty and sagacity; also of the reverse of these qualities—stealth and cruelty and darkness. The smaller head has already been entrusted to you. I am ready to hear your further pledge. And since it is the price of your silence, and perhaps of your service, it is agreed that Nels Faulkner shall if possible within a year be brought in and healed."

She paused. The candle flame wavered like a weed of red gold swaying deep in a black ocean. The face of the tiger seemed a living menace restrained somehow by the three silent figures at Branglan's back. He saw clearly that no more would be made known to him without his taking this step.

The thought of losing the threads that destiny had slipped into his fingers was unpleasant to Branglan, who like all men considered himself a good gamester. He waited for her to continue, but half knew that she would not. A golden twilight tinged the beauty of her face. Her eyes were still as the under-reaches of the sea. The shadow of her head and shoulders was upon the drawn curtains. The wind held its breath.

"I give you my word," he said.

He fancied that the hairy black face of the beast moved its whiskers backward —a smile. A murmur began behind him, a hushed intonation such as he dimly recalled from last night's experience in two other and lower rooms of this house. Fentress came to him, a figure of shadowed grace. Her hand was cool in his own.

"I am glad," she whispered.

"Thanks," replied Branglan huskily.

An enchanted moment was broken by Marriot, who said in his statesmanesque way: "Allen has made a particular study of our records, and, before he goes below to

make us a pot of chocolate—which also is one of his achievements—I suggest that he sketch briefly for you our work."

There was fatherly pleasure in the elder man's voice.

"I want all he will tell me," said the candidate.

"You will need certain points."

The panther head was glowing like the final minute of some rainy tropical sunset. Comfortable chairs were arranged in the candle-gloom. He could not see Fentress well enough. The plum-colored butler had completely forgotten the nature of his livery, like a player between the acts. He told his story with simplicity:

"A great number of years ago, a woman who means much to us, traditionally, repented of the manner in which she had become wealthy and powerful. She lived in France in the middle of the eighteenth century. History has a name for her, but to us she is the Pantheress.

"She loved beauty and order, but these qualities of her soul did not find expression until she was about to die. Some one came to her from a foreign land. She changed. Her ministers received certain commands from her, but her power faded the moment she was no longer quixotic and daintily cruel. Only one of her friends considered her to be sane. The others who had been close to her, damning the one who had come to her from a strange country, took most of her wealth by which her new commands were to be carried out. Yet her new courage remained firm.

"The idea lived. The thread of tradition, brought to her hand by that stranger whose skin was the color of brass, has never been broken. Nearly two centuries later we are following it.

"The one who remained faithful to the Pantheress made his way about Paris and through the provinces, later to London town, seeking among sailors' children and gipsies and tradesmen for the youth of any remarkable promise, whose personal fire might be dimmed by poverty and lack of opportunity. The Pantheress had herself known every opportunity, and was aware that she had wilfully killed out every beginning of her own genius for beauty and order. Knowing that she was late, she was grateful for this means of paying her debt to life. We doubt if she ever understood how the stranger had sought her out.

"In London a retired sea-captain who had much time on his hands, as well as a love of the fiddle, joined the first worker of the Pantheress, and his nephew, aged fourteen, was sent to Poland for instruction on the violin. It was this nephew, later playing his way not to fame but into a comfortable supply of court-gold, who developed the further precept of the brass-colored stranger by repaying his benefactor. The redeemed fragment of the wealth of the Pantheress began to increase.

"There were numerous incidents of aid to young persons—one for instance of a provincial lad who had studied almost too well the history of his country, his kings, and the shifting currents of Europe. He attracted the attention of the first agent of the Pantheress, who discovered that this boy was more than a walking repository for the politics of the world: in fact, he was ready to blaze with clear-headed ideas. Further than this, he had been asked to court—an invitation he coveted beyond all else; for, once there, he could begin talking, and his perfect confidence in himself assured him that his difficulties would end at once.

"But this lad of eighteen had no hose that were not thrice mended, no doublet or cloak or even a presentable smock. In the condition in which the searcher found him he would have been a laughing-stock, instead of the monarch's adviser and seer—which he afterward became. He was murdered at the age of thirty, but not before he had begun to weave one clean reasonable pattern into the fabric of western Europe, and repaid to his aged friend much more than he had accepted as a loan at the start, to buy velvet suitable to court.

"I shall not take time to mention all the cases of the latter half of that century. By some obscure law of life this work entrusted to the Pantheress continued to develop. Always there was some one to carry it on, even when the rigors of the church were most perilous to secret enterprise. Of course the idea was not to make money.

"In one of the Frenchman's last wanderings, the father of Beethoven was approached, to relieve the situation in that family on account of the son, who then played the violin and wrote musical compositions. The father accepted the gold pieces and began one of his habitual sprees, this time on a grander scale, but the boy Ludwig managed to get one of the coins, and by its means was enabled to make his famous visit to Mozart. No one knew how he financed that journey, nor do they now.

"You have read of that prince of Warsaw who so generously sent Frederick Chopin to a music school. That prince was a disciple of the Pantheress.

"But you did not hear of the small ship that crossed the Atlantic to Boston with a leather bag of gold, in charge of a young Englishman who had offended George III. He became a leader among the farmers and villagers round about Boston, winning friends to the revolt in the years before Mr. Washington was more than mildly interested in the cause of independence. That sack of gold diminished and disappeared, but in its stead appeared strong hearts and minds that had been taught, trained, and encouraged, together with a large collection of firearms. You will be interested to know that the money in this instance was never repaid.

"Another representative of the work made a pilgrimage to find Edgar Poe in Baltimore, but that hectic young genius fancied that a thief had come to him to hide his booty, and so would not accept aid from the unknown source. Nor would he agree to keep secret the source if it were told him. This notion of mysterious wealth, ill-gotten and great beyond counting, formed the background later of several of his best-known tales."

CHAPTER XI.

MODERN INSTANCES.

ALLEN changed his position, then continued: "At the discretion of Miss Eastney, modern names and instances may be cited. When a child is found, or a young person, who shows promise of becoming a dramatist, painter, musician, sociologist, or inventor, he or she is watched for a long time. If the indications are for genius, rather than mere talent, and if poverty or a similar lack of opportunity is heavy upon that young person, aid is offered fittingly.

"Even if we make a mistake, no great harm is done in having helped a nobody. When our gift is accepted, a simple promise is taken, not to inquire into the source of the money, or make public the fact of subsidy. The promise is given over the skull of a young panther, the ceremony being rather an aid in the keeping of the promise of silence.

"More than that, it is agreed that if at any future time the one who is helped becomes successful, he or she shall be given an opportunity to render a gift, large or small, regularly or only once, to the fund by which he or she was enabled to reach success. Eventually we call upon such a person of attained fame or wealth; we are identified by showing the skull of a week-old panther. Then this one whom we helped in the struggle of earlier years is at liberty to give, and he knows that his gift will aid some unhappy youngster with ideas too big for a cramped state of life.

"Or sometimes when we call to receive a gift from one of our 'children' who has gained worldly recognition, we find that this man or woman, however celebrated, has yet a greater idea to work out, requiring large advances of money for some artistic or economic or political move that would not be considered a sound investment by any banker, or some enterprise in which the professional investor would insist upon meddling, and in these cases we again provide cash.

"For example, in the matter of conquering the air with heavier-than-air machines, we placed a fortune with two fearless young engineers in the days when the purse-strings of the world were closed to such a foolhardy business. Both our children were killed the second time their machine cleared the ground. But, as you know, a great step had been taken.

"We are not interested in any one department of human activity. Our inves-

tigators, few as we are, have a peculiar training. We wait for unmistakable signs of genius, whatever its type.

"You have heard the name of Dr. Verenz spoken here to-night. He is a chemist who showed unusual promise, six years back. He has a God-given discernment of the cultures of disease, such as leprosy, cholera, black fever, and the like, as well as some original theories as to their isolation and cure. He was financed by us.

"Later, about five years ago, in his leisure periods, he sought an opportunity to repay us, and he was permitted to take on a few small duties for us and to make certain collections. It is true we were somewhat in disagreement about him, for elements of his character were in the habit of disappearing. But he was eager to return the benefit he had received. We believed him sincere, and there was no question about his superiority as a chemist. His book on toxicology is a standard reference work.

"Last fall he disappeared. At first we believed harm had befallen him. But his deceits really began before my father's death, four years ago. Dr. Verenz quarreled with father, and was disappointed by the outcome. Father was suspicious of Verenz, but we could not develop anything. Be assured that we watched the doctor very closely, but he concealed his malice these four years, until the open break. Father was right, though even now we do not see the matter clearly. We hold a letter that Dr. Verenz wrote to Nels Faulkner."

As the butler paused in the narrative, Marriot handed a bit of paper across to Branglan, who held it up near the candle. Dr. Verenz had written, without date or location:

> Better than I thought.
> Must have twelve thousand.
> Bring it to me at the Western
> Hotel, some time in June.

Branglan looked at the others, who had watched him read this note.

"What am I buying from him?" he asked.

Marriot shook his head, and the young butler was darkly thoughtful. Branglan glanced at Fentress and saw her differently in an instant—no longer any importance in the rather insufficient gipsy costume that betrayed her physical perfection, but now an air of straightforward mental activity—the coolness, the hazards, the charm, all merely a part to be played, all secondary to this world-purpose. She was a leader, without any flourish. It was not frivolity that kept her in the dancing costume.

On this strictly business basis the tall young man inquired again: "Where was Dr. Verenz when he wrote this?" There was no answer. "Wouldn't you think he was coming a long way, since he is unable to fix the date of his arrival here within half a month?"

"Yes," said Marriot, bringing his thoughts into speech. "I found this letter in Faulkner's coat when I brought him here to be punished. We did not know before that of his connection with Dr. Verenz. But it was necessary to stop Faulkner. We could not detain him bodily. You see the paradox of our position: The doctor at large, a deserter, offering to Faulkner a prize we cannot identify; and Faulkner himself a danger to us."

Branglan spoke. "But what did Faulkner do? Tell me the crimes I am to personify."

"Nels Faulkner was another whose motive at first in working with us was gratitude. We discovered him in a healthless condition, laboring for long hours in a lithographing shop, despondent because he lacked means to buy the tubes of color necessary to complete a mural. This canvas, which Marriot had seen in Faulkner's room, was fully sketched, though its sunlit colors of the Orient were but begun in patches. We waited. He lost his place in the shop because of illness. Marriot sent him to a doctor—no, not to Dr. Verenz. Later he was able to finish the mural and sell it to a winter country-club. After that, Faulkner's imagination seemed to be more keenly engaged in the *manner* of Marriot's help than in his own painting.

"It occurs to me, Branglan, that you are the only man who has ever been shown

all our mistakes. It may be a doubtful pleasure to you, but the fact seems significant to me. Our troubles, old and new, have centered on you, a bystander.

"But Faulkner: Gradually we gave him things to do. Illness had left a mark upon his mind, not always noticeable. Then he hit us a most destructive blow.

"Unlike Dr. Verenz, who in all his treachery, did not bring suspicion upon the work itself, Nels Faulkner blundered, seeming to lose all control of himself at times. Upon the occasion of our securing the photograph you have seen, he was demanding a large contribution. This was not merely the irony of extorting a gift, but he added his threats, and their wording was very serious. I myself had the honor to trap him. I can hardly remember that I am not talking to him right now, you are so like him in appearance.

"Assisted by the person he was blackmailing, I got him down-stairs, intending to bring him here for correction. The hour was late and dark. His friends were waiting down at the street door—three of them, I believe, for I had only a glimpse. I had also the dishonor of losing him. I went under, with a singing numbness in my ears. That was four months ago, you understand."

Branglan nodded. "I shall brag about that—the time my boys rescued me from you."

"That's the idea," continued the young Mr. Allen, crossing over his other plum-colored leg. "The result is that thirty men and women in the United States and four in Canada, each a dominant figure in the world of drama, society, diplomacy, or literature, and each of whom was helped four years ago from our fund, have turned against us and are ready to make us a public scandal. They are more than ready to arrest any one presenting a small panther skull. They consider our entire work a game of blackmail.

"That's why Faulkner had to be found and stopped. You see, we cannot ask the police to help us because that would mean the courts and perhaps a fatal misunderstanding of our work. We are not incorporated. We should be besieged by ten thousand mediocrities believing themselves to possess almost superhuman gifts, requiring only a few hundred thousand dollars each to develop this genius. The world is a great doubter.

"The personages I just mentioned are merely awaiting the chance to testify against us, owing to the impression they have gained from Faulkner's operations—visits he made without our authority. So we had to go after him alone, and we are few. Fentress went into his camp. He had never met her here, and did not guess her connection with us, knowing her only as a dancer in that lower room—sometimes a serviceable aid to him.

"She made possible our tracing him after he got away from me. It was not revenge we wanted; there is no personal grievance against him; but he has been wilfully wrecking our work, which is the only matter we take seriously. A few days ago she lost sight of him in Denver, and returned to their haunts here, expecting him to reappear in due time. She could not report to us here because either Basty or Ober or that waiter kept her always in view, fearing that she and their leader were double-crossing them. Fentress and Faulkner were out of the city at the same time, which seemed significant. Also the telephone wires to this house are split and unsafe for us. She was ready for you when you, as Faulkner, appeared to-night in the lower end of the café.

"It's another story, really, how Marriot, working from his own data, found him in Kansas City and succeeded in bringing him here alive."

CHAPTER XII.

"IN TO THE HILT."

"MORE finger-work along the spine, I suppose," said Branglan. The girl seemed pale, and was barely listening. Allen went on:

"Yes, and there is another factor that gave us a greater eagerness to catch Faulkner. I shall not go into details, as there isn't time, but briefly our source of supply has gone dry. We have never depended

upon the collection of money by calls and the presentation of the panther head. There is a deeper spring of power that has never failed, not in all the long record of this activity—until this past winter. We are cut off, somehow.

"This is very puzzling to us, and it may be more serious than just a cessation of financial energy. To be delayed for want of money is unique in our history. Of course we are not at the point of starving, but you know that secrecy is an expensive matter to maintain, likewise travel, in addition to the subsidies we seek to establish. This is one more reason for our haste to stop Nels Faulkner, and now to learn what he is to receive from Dr. Verenz.

"When you went out for your experiment and verifications this evening, we were holding Faulkner in the next room, and certainly we did not expect to let him go. Ordinarily that would have been stupid, to complicate matters for you in that way. But it was either let him go quickly or receive a call from the bluecoats, which would mean the end of our work. We might never survive the suspicion of the police."

Allen glanced half humorously at the sleek panther head in the gloom, and Branglan agreed with his statement.

"Faulkner made diagrams of the houses where he called on the world's business, and sold them to Basty and Ober for varying prices, always payable in advance. He himself used the skulls of alley cats in his interviews. This note, suggesting that he is anxious to buy something from Dr. Verenz, is a mere basis for guesswork. Faulkner is a painter, Verenz a chemist. Both are unscrupulous.

"In telling you of the Frenchwoman whom we call the Pantheress, and who lived two centuries ago, I did not mean to imply that she was the first to carry out this idea. She was merely the first in Europe, and our branch of the work crossed from Europe. I can't say very much about the stranger who came to her and gave her the plan—the man with the brass-colored skin. He did not remain in France. But you see why we are so disturbed about Faulkner and Dr. Verenz. After two centuries of progress, always small in number of cooperatives, but of incalculable effect upon the world, we are choked.

"Just now Nels Faulkner is at large in a state resembling aphasia—babbling, no doubt. As soon as we are able to get clear of this house, one of us will hunt him down again and take him in charge, if possible. And Dr. Verenz is registered at the Western Hotel, just as he advised you in that note. This is the 9th of June."

Branglan was comprehending slightly. He said:

"Up in the rooms to-night, Faulkner remarked that he had lost this note, and also that he couldn't find his money. The twelve thousand, or part of it—"

"Yes, all of it," replied Allen, glancing toward Marriot. The elder man said:

"The money was in his valise when I cornered him in Kansas City. It is now in this room."

Fentress spoke. "If Dr. Verenz has anything worth twelve thousand, it probably belongs to the fund."

Branglan's interest was dredging down to rock. "You wish me to go gather it in, whatever it may be. How well does Verenz know Faulkner?"

"Never very closely associated," said Allen, "at least not in their work with us. Our fielders seldom get to know each other. That is why Faulkner does not know that Fentress is one of us."

"Then I, as Nels Faulkner, am to go to the Western Hotel and complete the transaction with Dr. Verenz?"

"That would be a great help, if you care to do so," said Marriot evenly.

"I'll try," said Branglan. "You have me puzzled—all of you. But the world looks better from your point of view."

He was speaking more immediately to the girl, and in her incomparable way she said: "Thank you."

"Emergency man," muttered the heavy Mr. Glasby.

Marriot added: "Of course, Dr. Verenz may be tricking Faulkner to get possession of twelve thousand, with an imaginary article for sale. Expect no honor between these thieves."

Fentress suggested to him that, "Verenz is an adept with poisons."

The newly ordained member thought at once of the broken silver syringe that had failed to scratch him. "Anything superhuman about the doctor?"

"No," replied Marriot; "but you are supposed to know what you are buying from him, and we cannot guess what that may be. We did not know that Faulkner was in correspondence with him. The little note is only a postscript to some detailed business. We could not secure a confession from Faulkner before we punished him, nor could we piece together anything of importance from his talk afterward."

A thoughtful minute of silence passed. Branglan was adjusting himself to the enterprise, as well as scanning back over two centuries of this secret work. Allen arose and assumed again the character of butler.

"The coco," he said impersonally. "I'll go below and prepare it."

"He's our cook, too," whispered Marriot, "and our chauffeur."

"Thanks for the history," said Faulkner's double.

"More for you later," said Allen.

The plum-colored butler left the upper room. Fentress arose and went to the window, drawing aside the curtains very slightly to peer out between uneasy treetops, with care that no faint ray of candlelight shone out into the windy dark. The panther's head grinned in the yellow gloom, its eyes glaring in a fixed, helpless cruelty. It symbolized the stealthy selfishness that this little group strove to diminish in the world, yet it suggested also the sleek beauty of art, the grace and strength of perfect creatures, the wisdom that sees in the dark.

A moment later, in the lower regions of the house, sounded a jingle of broken glass. Fentress turned her head to listen. Marriot lifted out of his meditation to remark: "Our brother butler is growing careless with the china." Glasby crossed the room to the door, then muttered sharply and stepped hastily into the hall. A repressed groan sent a shock through the three in the room.

Candlelight flickered upon young Allen's face, now gray and drawn with pain. He was a weight in Glasby's arms. At the threshold he begged to lie down. His breath went out convulsively. Branglan saw the dark ooze that was soaking through the satin waistcoat and plum-colored livery. Swiftly Fentress was upon her knees beside the wounded man. Allen was struggling to speak, to restrain Glasby and Branglan from starting down-stairs.

"It came through the pantry window," he gasped—"in to the hilt—trench knife. Somebody wants Faulkner and the money."

Allen's tortured breath was a rasp in the semidarkness. Marriot moved in haste, with a difficult self-control, across the room to the panther head, and thrust an arm in between the drapes of the black steel altar. Branglan was watching the girl, as she cleared the fresh cut in Allen's side, while the young butler closed his eyes and repeated his whisper, "Hurry!"

Glasby had gone to the next room on an errand for Fentress. A thick brown-paper packet was placed in Flier Branglan's hands by the solemn Marriot, also a well-oiled magazine gun, dark, cold, ominous to the touch.

"He is going," whispered Marriot. "I wish there were more facts to arm you."

Branglan bowed, pocketing the weapon and placing the packet of currency under his left arm. Allen lay quite still. The girl had arisen, her face deathly pale.

Intensely her eyes held Branglan's. She was between him and the door, and he saw nothing else now. He moved toward the door, seeming taller than usual, his step unnaturally steady. A slender hand came out to him. No word was said. Emotion possessed him—something as vast as the far high roar of a mountain wind. Holding his breath, he stepped around the body in plum-colored livery, and descended the stairs.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SLOW SIEVE.

ON the second landing, in the shadows, he paused. Some one was walking ing about on the first floor. A white vane flitted across a lower doorway—the silent finger of a flash-light.

"The switch is beside the door," he called out from the stairs to the figure he had not yet seen in the room off the hall.

The side of the man's face showed at the edge of the doorway, like the evil eye. Branglan forced a short laugh and snarled down: "Come on out from there!"

"Are you alone?" the voice asked in a grinding whisper. "We was gittin' nervous out there."

"Very thoughtful of you," mocked Branglan.

The one in the doorway stowed away his large nickeled revolver. He wore a dusty cap that had once been black. A reddish collar-button stood alone in his shirt-band where collar and scarf should have been. His neck was like his face and hands, dirty, prematurely wrinkled. Ober, the small ratty man of indeterminate age, turned from his chief and stepped toward the window.

"Come here!" growled Branglan.

The figure stopped abruptly, as if caught on a wire. He had not reached the window. "I heard somethin' crack a minute ago."

"It wasn't you that threw that knife," said Branglan.

"A knife, was it?" exclaimed Ober, who evidently had been prowling in another room when the flying weapon came through. "Did Basty—"

"Basty's getting impatient," commented Branglan. "You're not going out that window like a common housebreaker. Here's all we want under my arm. We're in a hurry, too. That knife got Allen. They've sent me for a doctor."

The small wizen creature wanted to talk; he cowered a little, glancing from Branglan's eyes to the alluring parcel. But Branglan-Faulkner led his helper toward the front entrance.

There in the dimness he very swiftly struck a braced and savage blow into the corded neck. The little man was choked and half stunned. Branglan bore him down to the marble tiling and gagged a mouth of missing teeth—a cavern of living horror. Then he shouldered the twisting body and ran up-stairs with it, calling guardedly to those above. Glasby came down half-way to relieve him.

"One less to confuse me," whispered Branglan.

Ober was getting livelier now, but the stout man on the upper steps was able to handle him.

Branglan bounded down the stairs and again passed through the hall to the front door. He threw on the porch lights, unlocked the double doors, and sauntered forth. A cigarette had to be lighted leisurely. Tossing away the match, he called to the night-blots of shrubbery about the porch: "Basty! Come around here!" Eyes made themselves felt upon him.

A human dog skulked from the obscurity of the trees. Branglan, tightening his grip upon the packet, indeed upon himself, had his first moment of panic—a deep-rooted fear. They had been unable to assure him that this Basty, if it were Basty, would accept him as the true Faulkner. He sensed an unpleasant strength of personality in the shadows. The figure asked: "Where's Ober?"

There was no mistaking Basty, who was just as he had been described.

"They've got him," replied Branglan with a snarl which he imputed to Nels Faulkner. "Holding him for a killer. Your knife finished our butler."

"'Our butler' was going to look through the window," said Basty, with a grin that could be felt in the dark.

Basty was in his thirties, strong of body, and commonly dressed. At the moment, his eyes were steadier than his master's. He looked coolly from Branglan's face to the package under his arm, pondering something—a deliberate person, lord of slums. "Why do they let you go—again?"

Quite distinctly, this was a reference to the two copies of Nels Faulkner—the damaged original that had left the house earlier in the evening, and Branglan's present imitation. Branglan seized the nearest of a ring of lowered horns. "They're sending me for the undertaker. Did they fool you with that actor?"

"What actor?"

"The fellow who played he was me, two hours ago. They engaged him to spy on us. He does resemble me. When you got so nervous about my welfare, and demand-

ed my release, they told him to play sick or doped and go out to you, a living warning of what they were going to do to you."

Basty laughed. "Where were you?"

"Since when do you think you can ask that question? At the rooms I ran into this actor. He's harmless. But I came here to demand explanation."

"And your girl trailed you—double-cross?"

"That's what I thought, when she first came in. She is one of them, all right, and she has been watching me all the time, but to-night she reported that they had been wrong about me, unjust, and that my actions were O. K., except that I kept late hours in doubtful society. She recommended that I be reinstated with full privileges."

"I knew she was tricky, and no gipsy," said Basty, "but I didn't take her for a fool."

"They are all rather dull," declared Branglan, warming to his own yarn. "I said that I had been seeking out young genius, according to the terms of my obligations. Marriot even apologized to me and praised my endeavors in the slum districts. They're going to call in the actor, since they understand I was only using you and other wicked men as my passports to the tenements where budding genius is in want. I said I needed you in my underworld research. Marriot even considers you as an asset to the work. But you've made a mess with your knife now."

"Why didn't you let me know when you got back from the West?" said Basty. "I've needed the money."

"Marriot met me in Kansas City. I haven't had a chance to see you, but you'll get it."

They had reached the street lamp at one corner of the estate. Basty waited for Branglan to take the direction, and the latter did so without hesitation, heading out for "the rooms." He questioned Basty: "Why did you pull that police threat?"

"You made us promise to do it. Looked like the only way to get our cash."

No particular love for their leader involved!

Basty walked powerfully, having the brutal poise that is an inborn secret of the sultans of dark alleys. He added: "Ober watched the café, and I've been watching the house. Last night I saw you carried into the house by Glasby and young Allen. Half an hour later you came with Marriot in another car, and you were stewed. He helped you into the house. But you hadn't gone out. I hadn't been away for a minute. There ain't a dozen of you.

"Then you stood on the side porch early this morning with Marriot. Our waiter friend was here on duty, and he saw you. To-night at six you went out alone and sober. But there was one more of you in the house. I had to know. I said they'd have to show me, even if I had to plow through the house with some of my friends on the force, and they let loose that other one. He didn't have the money.

"Ober phoned that he'd met you outside the café at eight o'clock. You had made a big pick-up while you was eating, but you only slipped him a quarter because you had to keep him sober. He was expectin' his two thousand, but he's got no nerve. You didn't meet him at the rooms. Before ten, you were back again, alone. The girl came a few minutes later. Nothin' doin'. I sent Ober in to find out. Allen came down; he missed Ober, who was in the front of the house, but he spotted me at the window. I got him first.

"It don't matter who gets in my way, or how I get 'em out of it, but I've got two thousand comin' from you, and I'll collect Ober's at the same time, because it would be a waste of money to hire a lawyer for him. You and your extra copy and the girl and Marriot and the old woman can dope out anything you like, but I see you've got a package with you, and you and me are goin' to settle up—now."

"Sure," said Branglan. "We'll go to the rooms. You get your two thousand. I'll talk with Ober about his."

Branglan felt a most uneasy world around and beneath himself. Basty was more than suspicious, and might or might not believe that the man at his side was Faulkner, and that Faulkner had been taken into the fold again by Marriot.

"So they got little Ober for a killer!" remarked Basty with a humor that chilled Branglan. "He'll certainly spill a mouthful about you."

"I fixed all that before I came out of the house," said Branglan. This speech provided thought for the one who trod bull-like beside his tall companion with a packet. Then Basty said: "It hadn't ought to take much chair-juice to burn out that little huckie."

In a twisted sense, Branglan realized that this was an expression of Basty's affection for Ober—at the parting. But Branglan had presence to respond: "Doesn't take any more voltage to finish a heavyweight." And this remark rather directly framed the relation between the two who moved along the suburban street.

"Sure that isn't stage money?" from Basty.

"I wrapped it up myself," answered Branglan.

"After all their trouble to get something on you," queried Basty, "are they soft enough to send you out with an armful like this?"

Branglan put force into the reply: "I told you they were afraid of the police. They don't trust you to hold back the bluecoats. The actor they sent out instead of me was a stall, because they questioned my honesty. Then the girl came in to report, and she cleared me. They're sorry they used my double, to help trap me with the goods. Nothing is too good for me now.

"I said it would be a simple matter for me to come out and explain to you, my men, that they were treating me all right, and that the big house should be left alone henceforward. This was no more than arranged when you got nervous; Ober sneaked in, and you flipped your knife. Now they are burdened with a dead man and his supposed assassin. I started for a coroner, but I sha'n't bother about it at all.

"They've decided to give up the house just as soon as this mix with the law is past, if it passes. In the mean time, before the coroner appears and evidence is taken, there are things that must be removed from the house. Panther heads, for instance, or a steel altar like a safe, and this stack of currency. You made it unwise for any one but myself to come out of the house. I was coming, anyway, but you doubled the reason. Marriot was glad for a chance to show that he trusted me again."

Basty was looking at Branglan from lowered eyelids, his thick head tilted back maliciously. He drawled: "I didn't know you were such an easy liar."

"You say the dancer has been with Marriot all the time?" added the heavyweight.

"They didn't let me know that until an hour ago," explained Branglan, "when I was fully cleared."

"Marriot may have more operators than you know."

"Very likely."

"Glasby tagging after us now, huh?"

"I see no reason for that," said Branglan, yet hoping it might be true. "He'll be sent somewhere with papers and records."

Basty's distrust was not put to sleep. He did not think rapidly, for if he had done so, Branglan might have found it a simpler matter to pass for Faulkner. This Basty was not a superficial person. His brain was a slow sieve, shaking now at an inconveniently cautious rate. His muscles were quicker than his ideas, which prevented his being a fool.

The taller and straighter of the two figures stopped a taxicab townward bound, and Basty let him enter it first, after hearing the street and number properly given. They sat down together in the gliding interior. The brute features of the accomplice were half turned away, but Branglan felt the searching sidelooks of doubt.

The cab had not proceeded a quarter-mile when Branglan suddenly shifted sidewise against the window, turning as he did so. The gun in his hand, straight as a surveyor's level between Basty's eyes, brought a dull change over the thick-set one, who lapsed back into his seat, his wicked hands withdrawn from the parcel.

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 Silent Partner

by Herman Howard Matteson

CHAPTER I.

SHANGHAIED.

EDDIE BLAKE had been regaling himself with what he called a "store feed." A restaurant meal is something of a treat to one who, month in and month out, cooks his own chuck in the narrow and smoky confines of the galley of a ten-ton yawl.

The Bay wasn't much of a restaurant, so far as cuisine and cleanliness were concerned, but it got a big play just the same from the seafaring folk of the Seattle waterfront.

Decidedly the Bay would have been looked upon askance by an epicure. The floor was covered with sawdust. A long, pine counter was the only table. Stools were the only seats. The eating-tools were of pewter, and always felt greasy to the touch as if the dish-washer had been penurious with his soap.

The proprietor of the place was a dark, scowling person with an almost imperceptible forehead. Given jack-boots, and a belt filled with cutlases and pistols, he might have posed acceptably for an old buccaneer of the Spanish main.

The piratical appearing host at the moment stood leaning negligently against the counter by the cash-register, watching Eddie narrowly. Eddie balanced the last bite of a leprous-looking piece of pie on his knife, and gulped it down. Then he picked up his cup of tea.

Eddie always left his tea or coffee to the last. The cutthroat restaurateur seemed to be mightily interested in the disposal of that cup of tea.

Eddie took a tentative sip. Then, as he found the fluid none too hot for swift consumption, swallowed the entire cupful in three swallows.

A moment he sat staring at the "food-will-win-the-war" sign pinned to the greasy wall-paper. His mouth began to twitch, and a sickly, greenish cast began to spread about his lips. He arose unsteadily from the stool, staggered, would have fallen, but for the supporting grip of a swarthy, heavily built, sea-going sort of man who jumped to the boy's aid.

The maritime good Samaritan, who wore a dirty tarpaulin coat, steadied Eddie upon his feet, bestowed a wink upon mine host, who answered in kind. Then the sailor dragged Eddie to the door, beckoned to a hang-dog fellow leaning against a telephone-pole, called him by name: "Firefly."

Supported by Firefly and the mariner, whom Firefly addressed as Skama George, Eddie dragged himself drunkenly across the street to the dock where a three-masted schooner lay alongside. Up the gangplank Firefly and Skama George dragged the young yawl skipper, and dumped him on a bunk in the after-cabin of the deck-house.

Flat upon his back, Eddie lay breathing stertorously. He was due for a six or eight-hour sleep at least, for in his cup of black tea he had ingested forty grains of chloral hydrate, known more familiarly among the underworld profession as "knock-out-drops."

Skama George stepped out upon the deck,

Gruffly he addressed his crew of six men, as admirably chosen a band of water-front thieves as ever sprung a warehouse door.

"We got him!" said Skama George. "He can shoot the sun. I seen him take an observation from his yawl deck yesterday at eight bells, when he warped in. He can spell me on the bridge.

"We cast off at eight bells night, to grab the tide. Every man here at the first lick of eight bells. Remember."

One by one the six men and the skipper descended the gangplank, went their several ways for the remaining few hours of shore leave.

Skama George was the last to desert the dock. Before departing, he turned the key in the door of the cabin in which the young sailor lay, put the key in his pocket. He took a survey of the deck, went down the plank, disappeared through the wharf-house.

His heavy footfall had no more than died away when a thick-set, extremely dark young fellow thrust his head from behind a pile of baled hay. The boy's eyes were black, small, set in his head at a slight angle. His hair was abundant, coarse, black as a raven's wing. His cheek-bones were high, his neck short, his wrists and hands cast in a powerful mold.

Singularly enough, as it might have seemed to a "greener," his feet were effeminately small, but any Puget Sounder would have recognized him at once as a native who had spent the greater portion of his life in a canoe. The boy was Natinit, a full-blooded Aleutian Indian from the Island of the Four Mountains.

Natinit bestowed a malevolent look in the direction whence Skama George had gone. With cautious tread the Aleut crossed the dock, went up the gangplank in two jumps, whisked around the house to the side opposite the wharf.

He placed his ear against the cabin wall. Plainly he could hear the snorting, labored breathing of the young white man.

His friend, drugged, shanghaied! Yes, his friend, though he had never seen Eddie Blake until the day preceding. His friend notwithstanding—the only one he had had since the evil day when he had disembarked from Skama George's schooner, aboard which he, too, had been shanghaied.

Natinit took a survey of the deck. The work-boat, and the life-boats were all nestled in their cradles, the tarpaulin covers lashed into place. Lines and cordage were neatly coiled. Everything was spick and span as for a far voyage. Natinit's black eyes gleamed craftily.

Aye, the Explorer was due for a far voyage, to the Island of the Four Mountains, whence never again would a member of its crew depart alive. Doomed! Doomed every man of the crew of the Explorer. Their landing at Four Mountains would be their sentence of death, worse than death, for it would mean torture first, cunning, devilishly contrived torture, and then, finally, merciful death.

But Eddie, his friend Eddie, shanghaied, a member of the crew, also would suffer torture, death. Nagichik, tyee of the Four Mountain Aleuts, would know no difference between Eddie and Skama George's villainous crew. Eddie, his *tillicum*, his friend, must not suffer torture, death.

With his thick, strong fingers, Natinit began working at the latticed blind of the cabin window, which slid on two brass strips. With a creak, the blind gave an inch—another inch. With a heave Natinit shoved it clear, wormed his body through the aperture.

Cold sweat stood forth upon the white boy's pale face. The Aleut placed his palm upon the young sailor's breast. The heart was beating weakly, flutteringly—but beating.

Natinit held up his own broad hand. Upon the back of it was tattooed a figure representing his tribal totem of the Four Mountains—a bear and a thunderbird.

Natinit had been official tribal tattooer. At the death of the present Shaman, or medicine-man, Natinit was due to succeed to the latter's office and estate, a place next in council and in war to that of the tyee, or chief.

Would he ever be Shaman of Four Mountains? Natinit had begun to doubt and fear.

The dark face of the Aleut became fairly demoniacal in expression. Vividly there

was stamped upon his memory the episode of the morning when he had landed at Onga a far settlement of the Aleutians, his kyak, loaded with rare pelts of seal and sea-otter.

A ship had been at dock, the Explorer. Skama George had waved him on deck to barter and trade. When he had awakened after a few swigs from a black bottle that Skama George had generously and hospitably proffered, the Explorer was at sea, miles and leagues from the Aleutians.

Then Skama George had told the simple, credulous boy that he, the Aleut, had been taken very much sick, and that they had taken him on the ship out of kindness, to cure him.

Lies! All lies!

Bestowing many kicks and cuffs, Skama George had set Natinit to work slaving in the galley, washing dishes, fetching and carrying like a slave. A Shaman to be, doing menial service for a white thief! The rich cargo of seal and sea-otter Skama George had locked in a strong box in his own cabin.

By degrees, to the full the design of Skama George became known to Natinit. Not, however, until after the Explorer had berthed at Seattle dock did Natinit learn the subtlety of Skama's scheming.

Natinit applied for a berth aboard a ship bound for Alaska. With oaths and blows he was driven from the deck. The port captain told him to move on. The wharf police heckled and hounded him. Skama George had spread the report along the water-front that Natinit was a thief, a blackguard, and a handy man at a knife thrust in the back.

When Skama George discharged his old crew, and began to recruit another among the riffraff of the sailor's boarding-houses—then Natinit understood what desperate project Skama meditated. He was going to return to Four Mountains and loot the cache of Tyee Nagichik of its priceless store of seal and sea-otter pelts.

Thereupon, Natinit had smiled to himself. Robbed, swindled more than once, Tyee Nagichik, as Natinit knew, had taken counsel with the captain of the United States Coastguard ship. The captain had told Tyee Nagichik that Nagichik was entitled to protect his property against thieves, whether white or red.

Nagichik had called a council. Thereafter, night and day, Aleut braves armed with thirty-thirty rifles patrolled the Island of the Four Mountains. Nagichik had sworn an Aleut devil oath that no white thief should ever land, and escape alive.

Seeking without avail to obtain a berth aboard a north-bound ship, Natinit had contrived to live by carrying luggage occasionally for persons landing from the passenger-ships. But this mode of livelihood had been precarious. The Aleut could have done better but for the wharf police, who drove him away whenever they encountered him.

Then came the first friendly hail that the Aleut had had since the day he had been shanghaied at Onga. A giant of a young white man had gone warping in a ten-ton yawl which he sailed handily alone, as any real sailor may Natinit had taken the white boy's line, had made fast for him.

Natinit stood by respectfully, silently, while Eddie had shot the sun, which he did every noon to keep in practise. Eddie had marked some things on a paper, had put away the shiny, brass sextant, had come ashore. Then, timidly, Natinit had asked the white man if he had a job for an Aleut boy who wanted to earn passage money home.

Questioned for details, Natinit had confessed freely that he had the name of thief, though he was a Shaman to be and had never in his life stolen so much as a dead herring.

"Why, Nat," Eddie had replied in a manner the most friendly, "I don't know but I got a job for you. I don't know but I have. I and my partner is going to Charlotte for cargo of copper. I could use a hand.

"I got a silent partner, but they won't kick. Silent partners don't cut in much nohow, but to take rightful share of earnings. My partner is coming down from Bellingham to-morrow on the night boat — gets here in the morning. I can give you a berth, sure."

In a glow of thanksgiving at the prospective emancipation, Natinit had walked

the wharf, eyes shining, head erect. He wished the silent partner were already there, that he could set sail with his friend, Skipper Eddie Blake of the stanch yawl Klatawa.

Then he had seen Eddie dragged from the Bay, drugged, helpless, by Skama George and Firefly. Natinit knew what was afoot, for he remembered the lethal effects of the stuff in the black bottle given him at Onga by the skipper of the Explorer.

Natinit knew what was in the wind, knew for a certainty when Eddie was taken aboard the schooner, rather than to his own boat, Klatawa. And at once Natinit surmised the reason why Eddie had been selected for abduction.

Many times the Aleut had heard Skama curse because he had no man on board who could take a reckoning. Skama George had stood aft upon the Explorer's deck while Eddie had been taking his practise squint at the sun; Natinit had seen him.

The police! No use for Natinit to report to the police that a white man was being shanghaied. Natinit feared the police. He felt mortally certain that a word to the men in blue would mean only a trip to the *skookum-house*—jail—for himself, and would bring no manner of relief or succor to his white friend.

Natinit stood in the cabin beside the bunk upon which the heavily breathing white man lay sprawled. He lifted his own right hand, regarded the tattooed totem on the back of it, the bear and the thunderbird, sacred emblem of the Four Mountain Aleuts. Suddenly his black eyes brightened.

He would save his friend Eddie. Also he would send a message to Nagichik and his fellow tribesmen telling them that their future Shaman still lived.

From a pocket, Natinit drew forth what looked like a small comb with exceedingly fine teeth. Also he produced a walrus-tusk ivory box with a tightly fitted lid.

From the box he pinched out a portion of a reddish substance, began to work it in the palm of his hand. Thrusting the teeth of the comb into this substance, Natinit lifted the white man's helpless right hand. Presently upon the back of the young skipper's hand appeared in bright red and blue the sacred totem of the bear and the thunderbird.

Natinit surveyed his work, smiled down benevolently at his friend Eddie, crept through the window, restored the latticed shade to place.

His friend Eddie. No harm would come now to Eddie upon the Island of the Four Mountains.

From a corner of the wharf-house, Natinit took up his watch. At eight bells the crew were on board the Explorer. The stern-line, head-line and spring-line were cast off. The top's'ls caught the breeze. Aided by the ebb of the tide, the schooner moved off.

As far as Point No Point, Natinit watched the craft, her sails shimmering in the light of the quartering moon. Then he crept into a space behind a great tank where he had spread a bed of burlap sacks.

His friend Eddie, Natinit communed drowsily, his friend would be safe on the Island of the Four Mountains. As for Skama George, and his crew of devil-men, well—

"Good-by, *deaubs* (devils)," said Natinit, half aloud. "Good-by. I never no see you some more. Good-by."

CHAPTER II.

SILENT PARTNER SETS SAIL.

THERE was the highly important matter of rustling some *pil chickamin* for breakfast money, so Natinit was up and stirring before daybreak.

The Bellingham boat, which had arrived at four o'clock, lay at the wharf, her range and side-lights blinking dully. As Natinit passed the stern of the ship the smell of frying onions and beefsteak smote upon his hungry senses. A straggling few passengers who had left early calls with the deck steward were filing down the gangplank, wet and slippery in the dew of early morning.

One after the other, Natinit accosted them. No one wanted his baggage carried. Still Natinit persevered. That whiff of

onions and beefsteak had stiffened the spine of his courage. But still, it seemed, no one wanted his baggage lugged.

Finally, when Natinit was about to turn away from the gangplank in despair, a girl of diminutive statue, carrying an immense and obviously weighty suit-case of the telescope variety, appeared upon the deck. In answer to Natinit's anxious hail she returned a cheery answer.

"Yes, sure," she said, smiling up at him as he took the heavy grip from her hand. "I can't scarcely pack that gipsire myself. I hain't got the heft—nor height. Sure, yes. Two bits for you if you pack it."

Side by side, Natinit and the girl stood upon the wharf, the former awaiting instructions.

"You made out a boat called Klatawa?" demanded the girl.

Klatawa! Why, that was the boat of his friend Eddie.

Natinit picked up the telescope, pointed down the wharf.

As they passed under a flickering arc light, Natinit observed that the girl was fair of skin, and abundantly freckled. Her eyes were blue, round, fearless, yet kindly. Her short upper lip had a habit of twittering slightly as if it were sniffling always for something to laugh at.

"That gipsire is some heavy," she offered, looking up at Natinit brightly. "Yes, she's some heavy. I got in there, knocked down, my thirty rifle and my paw's old six-gun, and a heap of ca'tridges for both. She's heavy, but you can pack her; you hain't no invalid."

Fears, trepidations began to assail the future Shaman of Four Mountains as, with his companion, he neared the yawl Klatawa. In a deep study he deposited the grip upon the planks beside the craft, stared off across the bay, looked up at the gulls flying overhead, anywhere but at the little girl with freckles.

"There she is," said the girl eagerly, "the old Klatawa. Eddie hain't up as yet. Sleepy-head.

"My boat," she exclaimed proudly, plucking Natinit by the sleeve and pointing to the yawl. "That is, she belongs to I and Eddie. My paw and Eddie fished her, freighted her for five year. My paw is dead. Half of her is mine now. I'm the silent partner."

Natinit was staring down hard at the wharf planking. The silent partner rattled on at a great rate telling Natinit how she and Eddie had planned a voyage to Charlotte Islands to bring down a ten-ton cargo of copper which was cheap in the North, but very dear in Seattle.

This would be her first really and truly voyage. She had been on many a short cruise with Eddie, could work ship, according to her strength with any man of upper Sound. The management of affairs she left to Eddie, because, after all, she was only the silent partner.

Still Natinit stared at his feet. Then, bluntly, brutally, as the Indian fashion is, he blurted out the truth.

"He no here, my friend Eddie. He go away. He shangaied. He go a far voyage to Island of Four Mountains. He purty much stay away now whole year, maybe two. He gone."

"Gone! Shanghaied!"

"Yes. He gone now. Shanghaied."

"And you let 'em shanghai Eddie Blake? You say he's your friend. Hain't you hisn? Didn't you have no gun?"

Natinit, ashamed, turned his face away. This girl couldn't understand the position he had been in.

Then the silent partner proceeded to give him the tongue-lashing of his life. Call himself friend! Why, she, a girl, a very little girl at that, if she had been standing by when Skama George packed her partner aboard—why, she'd 'a' searched out her paw's old six, and she'd 'a' lammed loose, and she'd 'a' spilled the old cannon for all she had.

"Listen, you Aleut boy, if I'd 'a' been here, this Skama George would 'a' done his work in the smoke. You betcha, and lay to that."

Earnestly Natinit attempted to explain. He had the name of thief. The police hounded, persecuted him. He had had no weapon of any sort. He had been helpless, for the crew of the Explorer numbered six mighty tough men besides the skipper, toughest of all. Certainly no use to com-

plain to the police, for they were friendly to Skama George, and hostile to himself.

The girl stood staring across the open of Elliot Bay. "Island of Four Mountains," she said musingly. "Something of a voyage. But we could take the inside passage up British Columbia, dodge the open sea till past the Charlottes.

"Then we'd have to navigate. The North Pacific and the Bering is always in a quarrel. It hain't just a trip, it's a voyage."

A moment she stood silent. Then, with sudden decision, she tossed her small, fair head, bade Natinit carry the telescope on board. Climbing down the companionway, she made a swift survey of the galley shelves and lockers.

A stub of a pencil hung from the cupboard door by a string. She tore off a corner of a shelf paper and began to write. Then she turned her back upon Natinit, dove her hand into her stocking, turned and thrust a roll of bills at the Aleut.

"There's a list," she said, also proffering the bit of paper. "You can't read United States? No matter. Any big grocery-store in town can fill the order. Just hand 'em the paper. And hurry. Oh, you say you hain't got a weepon of no kind. Here."

Again she turned her back. She handed Natinit two other bills. "You warp into a hardware, buy a thirty-thirty, and ten boxes of ca'tridges. And hurry. I'll be shoppin' fast as I can. I want to get quite a lot of things.

"One thing I will have, or start a seam tryin'. Last two or three summers I seen the vacation girls in the islands havin' em. I'm goin' to have one, too, one of them little, round mirrors, and a powder-puff. Hurry, Aleut boy. Be back here sure by four bells, ten o'clock."

Natinit did hurry. Proudly he rode up to the wharf on the seat of an automobile delivery-rig. He had packed the supplies neatly away upon the shelf and in the locker when the girl arrived, her arms piled high with bundles. When she thrust her head in at the galley door, Natinit was stroking and caressing the stock of his new thirty-thirty, talking to it like a lover.

At once, in response to the girl's crisp order, he laid down the rifle, swarmed the companionway, cast off the lines, gave the Klatawa a thrust out into the stream with the boat-hook. He sprang to the pin-rail, hoisted away the tops'l and the mains'l. The boom swung, the sails bellied. Away went the Klatawa, heeling it for Point No Point.

Natinit went forward to slack away on the jib, which wasn't quartering to suit him. While the Aleut was busy about this operation, the girl leaned against the tiller-haft to steady it, dove into her stocking, produced a powder-puff and a little, round mirror. Then, as she had seen the summer girls in the vacation resorts of the San Juan Islands do, she proceeded to camouflage her freckles.

CHAPTER III.

TO THE NORTH.

WHEN, finally, Eddie awakened, it was with a rolling and a roaring head. The effort to rise to a sitting posture in the bunk brought out the cold sweat in beads.

He lifted his hand to his aching brow. Even his hand felt feverish, hot, heavy. And it was. For a considerable time following the operation of tattooing, the skin is inflamed and feverish.

In wonderment, Eddie regarded the back of his right hand. There was as perfect a bit of the seaman's ornamental art as he had ever seen, a tattooed totem of a bear rampant superimposed upon a spread-winged thunderbird.

His head none of the clearest, Eddie tried to collect his thoughts, to remember what had happened. He had heard of bibulous sailors awakening after a spree in some *bund* to find themselves ornately tattooed. There was Faraway Dan, off the clipper ship Handsome Nelly. Dan had come-to to find a blue-bottle fly tattooed on the end of his nose.

But Eddie was abstemious of habit. He had drunk water only. Oh, yes, and a cup of black tea, in the Bay. Then he recalled a circumstance that, at the time, he

had disregarded—that tea had had a saltish, brackish taste.

Drugged! Doped! Shanghaied! Clear, perfectly clear and plain! Doped and shanghaied!

Eddie twisted his throbbing head, looked through the cabin window. That would be Patos light off the starboard. Patos light was a good hundred miles, as the course ran, out of Seattle.

Still rather numb and stupid as to wits, he lay back in the bunk, his eyes surveying the interior of the cabin.

This *was* a cabin, officer's quarters. The crew bunked always in the fo'c's'le. Officer's quarters.

There came a knock at the door, which opened before Eddie had had time to reply. A dark, swarthy, villainous countenance poked itself within. Skama George, intending, no doubt, to be very friendly and ingratiating, bestowed upon Eddie a horrible grin.

Eddie knew Skama George by sight, better by reputation. Half-breed son of a Neah Indian mother, and a Finnish sailor father, the name of Skama George had been habitually linked with enterprises that required the dark o' moon for their consummation. Ruthless, unscrupulous, though of a courage and a desperate determination unquestioned, Skama George was hated by many, admired by some, feared by all.

"Turn out, mate," said Skama, wrinkling his dark, leathern face into another ferocious grin. "Turn out. I want you to take the Explorer through the Narrows. You know these waters better than me."

"Mate!" Skipper Skama George had addressed him as "mate."

His head reeling, Eddie set his feet upon the floor, started to rise. He had been shanghaied, and he knew it. Years before Eddie's father, now dead and gone, had been shanghaied out of the Bucket of Blood boarding-house at Port Townsend.

"Eddie," his father had said, discussing the incident years afterward, "if ever you get shanged, take her as she comes. Grin and say nothin'. Lay for'ard to the capstan if so be you're ordered. They hain't no other system."

In a flash, Eddie recalled the advice. Weaving to and fro on uncertain legs, he gave his forelock a respectful pull.

"Aye, aye, sir. Just one word, skipper," Eddie continued. "When this ship clears back into port, I expect a full billet of pay, and libel money to cover the worth of my yawl Klatawa, which will likely be stole, or held for wharfage."

"Sure," answered Skama George promptly enough. "That's fair. That's a go."

In the doorway of the cabin, Eddie came to a pause, bracing himself against the door jamb. A tender and concerned look had crossed his face. He was thinking of the silent partner, who, at the moment, would be on her way to Seattle. She would pace the wharf, eating out her heart with worry, uncertainty.

"Will you leave me heave the Explorer to here off Patos," Eddie asked, "while I get a letter off for the packet boat?"

Skama's cunning little eyes glinted.

"No," he answered curtly, turning away. "Lay aft to the wheel."

His head still reeling, though clearing gradually under the tonic of the sweet, fresh sea breeze, Eddie took the Explorer through the Narrows, through the Hole in the Wall where lay rotting upon the shelving rocks the ribs of many a merchantman, and even of a British battleship.

But the tide was at slack, and Eddie navigated the schooner without mishap. Finally he warped the Explorer out into the open Pacific and sang out to Skama George to know the course.

Skama brough the chart, pointed to the Aleutian archipelago which extends from the Alaskan mainland into the ocean for hundreds of miles. The skipper pointed to a horseshoe-shaped island, about midway in the string, the Island of the Four Mountains.

Puzzled, but uttering no word of question or surprise, Eddie spun the wheel, cast a look aloft to note the haul of the sails. "North by west a quarter west," he said, turning the wheel over to the scar-faced, sinister devil whom Skama called Firefly.

A precious crew had Skama George aboard the Explorer. First, there was Firefly. Firefly's specialty was the burning and scuttling of ships for revenge, or the insur-

ance money. There was Winch Kennedy. Winch Kennedy was shy his port light. The remaining right eye was of a greenish color, with a brown spot in the lower sector as if the optic were about to suffer an eclipse.

There was a squat person called Hellwest, this title being a convenient abbreviation for the sailor's favorite expression, "Hell, West and crooked." Hellwest was short fore and aft, but broad of beam. Hellwest had the name of being the toughest tar in a rough and tumble on the entire Seattle water-front. In former, unregenerate days, before the saloons went out, Hellwest's favorite relaxation from serious enterprise was to appear in a groggery, invite all comers to fight, the first eye out for the whisky.

In addition to the notables named, there were Skamowaka, a half-breed, Jensen, a Finn, and Lallie Uku, a Kanaka.

A prowl through the ship showed Eddie that some desperate enterprise was in the wind. The fo'c's'le was an arsenal of thirty-thirty rifles and automatic revolvers. From the deer's antlers fastened to the wall of Skama George's cabin depended three other rifles, and as many automatics and six-shooters.

Day after day the Explorer sailed on, now with a hurrying gale astern, now beating laboriously to windward. Throughout the voyage Eddie was made responsible for the course and the reckoning. Skama could shoot the sun, but his calculations were apt to vary a degree or so. Haste required accuracy in the computations.

Still other days the Explorer sailed on, and then, finally, the Island of the Four Mountains lay off the starboard beam.

It was the middle afternoon watch when Firefly, in the crow's-nest, made out the four peaks which gave the island its name. Darkness best suited the enterprise of Skama George and his wharf-rat crew, so Eddie was bidden to sail the Explorer three ways, Skama marking a triangle in the palm of his hand with a forefinger.

When night fell, Eddie put the ship over, made for shore, a point where the bases of two mountains dipped to a narrow stretch of beach. Under the lifting influence of the mountain rise, the surface breeze died away. Sails flapping, the ship drifted in.

A hundred fathoms off shore, the anchor was let go, the hawse hole having first been well muffled with sacks, and the links of the anchor chain thoroughly greased with hard oil. Skama George was not announcing his arrival with a bit more noise than could be avoided.

Jensen and Lallie Uku were told off by Skama to remain on board to guard ship. The sails were to be left hoisted. Jensen and Uku were ordered to shoot, and shoot to kill, any Aleut who attempted to board the craft, or even approach her.

The work-boat, ample to transport six men, was freed from its cradle. As Firefly and Hellwest twisted the davits outward to swing the boat free, one of the small, wire steadying cables fetched loose, whipped back, the frayed ends of the wires raking Eddie across the back of the hand which bore the thunderbird totem.

The cut, which was rather deep, bled freely. Skama George wrapped it about with a strip of clean linen, then bound up the hand in a sailor's blue bandanna handkerchief.

The work-boat was lowered away, and Skama, Eddie, Firefly, Winch Kennedy and Skamowaka embarked.

Landing upon the beach, the nose of the work-boat was lifted onto the sands just sufficiently high to hold her from going adrift. Skamowaka was detailed to patrol the beach, and keep an eye peeled to see that no one tampered with the boat. Skama George was preparing for a quick getaway should the exigencies of the situation require it.

Through a narrow cañon, heavily wooded with cedar and alder, Skama and his crew crept forward.

Crawling through the thickets, now advancing swiftly in the clearer spaces, the expedition came finally into sight of the open where nestled the village of the Four Mountain Aleuts.

The houses, or igloos, were nondescript affairs, being constructed of odds and ends of driftwood, hand-split slabs of cedar, in many instances reinforced by the immense

rib bones of the northern whales. All the igloos were thatched and patched with walrus hides and the commercially valueless pelts of the hair seal.

A waning moon had risen, casting its blue shimmer over the village. Now stood forth in the center of the village the great, hand-carved totem pole, bearing at its top the bear, and immediately beneath the spread-winged thunderbird.

Landward from the totem pole stood the largest igloo of the group. This would be the dwelling place of the tyee or chief. A flaring, wavering light, as from a pine torch or open fire glimmered through the single, narrow window.

Skama George drew his automatic. Followed closely by the crew, all of whom save Eddie bore naked weapons in their hands, Skama crawled across the open, came to a pause beneath the window of the big igloo. He arose, pressed his face boldly against the glass, peered in.

CHAPTER IV.

PRISONERS.

EDDIE straightened his body erect, and ganced over Skama's shoulder.

A venerable Aleut, the sparse hair of chin and upper lip as white as the breast of a winter ptarmigan, sat upon a pile of fox and bear skins. Before him, upon the earthen floor, was a *five-stick fire*, the smoke escaping by a sheet-iron funnel placed above the flame, a custom obtained from the Russian sealers and whalers. Indeed, the stove itself was of Russian manufacture, having been obtained in trade for furs.

Something of dignity and power in the old man's countenance told of his estate. For nearly fifty years he had been the tyee of the Four Mountain Aleuts. In his youth, esteemed for bravery, cunning, courage, his prowess in battle and as a taker of the seal, walrus, whale and sea otter, his renown had spread throughout the archipelago.

He was an old man now, a very old man, but in his breast still glowed the spark of his youthful valor. As for cunning and craft, the years had but refined them, given them a keener edge.

The Tyee Nagichik sat staring into the fire. He lifted his hand and stroked his meager beard. The skin of his hand, withered, wrinkled, was the color of burnished copper. Upon it stood forth in bold relief the blue and red totem of the bear and the thunderbird. Beneath the bandage on Eddie's right hand, there rested an exact replica of the symbol upon the hand of the old tyee.

Nagichik arose, walked to the side of the igloo. There hung a score or more perfect seal pelts, taken when the animals had been in winter prime. At any furrier's in the United States these skins would be worth hundreds of dollars each. These skins, obviously the pick of the season's take, would be but a small part of the whole.

Somewhere, in a hidden cache of the island, would be dozens, scores, hundreds more. Natinit, in his credulous innocence, before he had become fully aware of Skama's treachery, or that the skipper had really shanghaied him, had with great boasting told Skama that his people had many "man high" bundles of seal and sea otter.

As Tyee Nagichik reached, felt of the downy fur of the seal pelts, Eddie could hear Skama George expel his breath sharply, mutter to himself.

Skama George released the safety on his automatic. Slowly, deliberately, he lifted the weapon, brought it to bear upon the old Aleut.

Murder! Cold-blooded murder!

Eddie seized the half-breed's arm. A howl that resembled a screech sounded almost in his ear.

Skama George yanked his arm free, fired fell to the earth when a rifle barrel cracked him over the head. Firefly turned loose with his gun, as did Hellwest and Winch Kennedy.

A fusilade of shots replied from a spot no more than ten paces away. Then, as the Aleuts rushed the white men, Eddie sprang away for the shelter of the trees bordering the village.

Half a dozen Indians were upon him be-

fore he had made half the distance. He was dragged to the earth, his arms pinioned, and his wrists and ankles bound about with strands of seal hide.

Back to the igloo the Aleuts dragged their white prisoner. The venerable tyee stood in the doorway calmly giving orders. Firefly, Winch Kennedy, and Hellwest lay dead upon the ground. Skama George, alive but unconscious, lay trussed up like a market fowl.

Speaking in Chinook, the universal Indian tongue of the north Pacific, Nagichik ceremoniously addressed his braves.

"My braves, a vow I swore. No thieving white man who comes to the Island of the Four Mountains shall ever leave it alive. And thus it shall be."

The old tyee stepped from the doorway, kicked the three dead men, one after the other, in the ribs. "These—don't matter. These," indicating Eddie and Skama George, "hold them in the middle igloo until I call for them. Go now. Guard them closely."

Lifted bodily, Eddie and Skama were carried to the igloo designated, thrown in upon the floor as if they had been bales of skins. Presently a third human bundle was cast in beside them—Skamowaka, unconscious, bleeding from a desperate scalp wound.

And again, shortly, a fourth was flung into the igloo—Lallie Uku, the Kanaka left with Jensen to guard the Explorer. Jensen, quite dead, had been hove over the side into the sea.

Throughout interminable hours, Eddie lay upon the hard floor, wringing, twisting, seeking to dispose his tortured limbs in some posture less cramped and painful. After a time Skama George came to his senses. Though four of his crew were dead, he seemed to have lost none of the desperate courage and determination that had long made his name one to conjure with among the outlaws of the Sound and north Pacific.

Muttering the most appalling oaths and threats, Skama George swore in two commingled tongues that he would eat raw the heart of Tyee Nagichik, and make way still with the cache of seal skins. Hell, high water, nor the seven Aleutian devils should not prevent.

Finally Eddie dozed off into troubled sleep. He awakened with a start. Some one was standing over him.

It was Skama George. Indian all in craft, cunning, Skama George had accomplished what to a man of pure white strain would have been impossible—he had freed himself from the cutting rawhide strips that had bound him.

"Shsh," warned Skama in a whisper, as Eddie attempted to rear his body to a sitting posture. "Shsh!"

Skamowaka and Lallie Uku still lay unconscious.

Skama George moved to the rear of the igloo, began pulling tentatively upon the end of one of the cedar planks. There followed a faint creak as the plank came away. Again, exerting to the full his enormous strength, the half-breed ripped loose a great whale rib that had been set into the side of the igloo as a support.

"Skama!" Eddie called in a whisper. "Skama!"

The skipper returned with cat-foot tread to the white man's side.

"These rawhides, Skama—rip 'em loose; they're cuttin' me to death!"

"Just a minute," Skama replied.

The half-breed returned to the aperture that he had torn in the side of the igloo, thrust his head through, reconnoitered. The guard was pacing the side of the igloo opposite where Skama had made the hole. He turned, regarded Eddie for a moment, sprang through the hole, was gone.

At the damnable perfidy, treachery of the half-breed's desertion, Eddie burst into bitter invective. Swearing, crying, he blubbered for an instant like a school boy.

The cunning Skama George had studied every angle of the situation. Eddie, a pure white, apparent to all the most superior personage of the crew of the Explorer, would be regarded by Nagichik as the most desired captive of the whole thieving outfit.

In the exultation that the old chief would sense in having captured one whom he would believe to be the chief of the marauding expedition, the escape of Skama George would be considered of negligible impor-

tance. Skama George had left Eddie Blake to the mercies of the savage Aleuts as hostage for his own safety and escape.

Eddie drew a quick breath, as if to sound the alarm, but thought better of his revengeful purpose. Though his reason told him otherwise, he gave Skama the benefit of the doubt. There was a remote chance that the half-breed had some scheme for the liberation of his mate.

Upon hands and knees, the igloo constantly between him and the pacing guard, Skama made his way to the shelter of the cedar and alder grove. He arose to his feet, hurried to the beach.

The work-boat lay upon the sands where it had been left. Two jagged holes had been stove in either side. This fact notwithstanding, Skama, by main strength, dragged the boat to the edge of the lowered tide, thrust it into the water.

At once the craft sank nearly to the gunwales. But it would still support a man's weight. Standing upon a thwart, his feet in the water, the skipper sculled the loggy boat out to the schooner, brought it under the overhang of the Explorer's stern. With a catlike leap, Skama jumped, caught the tiller chains, and with their aid swarmed on board.

Cautiously he crept along the deck, peered in at the window of his own cabin. The swinging lamp was flickering and smoking.

The two Aleuts who had been left to guard the Explorer after the killing of Jensen and the capture of Lallie Uku, had fallen upon certain alcoholic stores that Skama kept in a locker. A square bottle stood upon the transom—empty. The two Aleuts lay sprawled upon the floor in a profound stupor.

Skama George entered the cabin. Hoisting an Aleut to his shoulder as if it had been a sack of meal, the half-breed bore the insensate body to the side, dropped it into the sea. The second Aleut he carried also to the side, fed the drunken native to the fishes.

Heaving upon the capstan bar until it curved, Skama hove in the anchor. He ran to the wheel as the schooner payed off, set her down a point. Alone the desperate picaroon sailed the Explorer, east by north, toward the Aleutian Island of Umnak.

CHAPTER V.

THE VOW OF NIGCHIK.

SHIFT and shift about, four hours off and four on, Natinit and the silent partner sailed the Klatawa up the coast of British Columbia. A longer course than that of the open Pacific, it was safer, much safer for a small craft. With the shore constantly in view, with charts to consult for the reckoning, the matter of navigation was comparatively simple.

Steadily they held the little craft upon her way. Past the green and ever-beautiful Island of Queen Charlotte they went. Then, as they faced the open, their trust in God and the compass, the Klatawa began to toss her nose like a fretted horse as she began to feel the sullen swells out of Bering Sea.

Luck and the winds favored them. Sailing fair, they came finally into sight of the curving archipelago that arose gray and dun amid the spume of the sea, and the lowering, ever-present fog banks.

Indianlike, Natinit had told the girl nothing further of the details of the shanghaing of Eddie Blake. He had had his say that morning on the Seattle wharf.

When still some leagues off the Aleutians, he began to ponder. With sympathetic distress he had noted that the white girl appeared worried, anxious. Many times he had found her in tears. Aleutian girls rarely cry. It must be indeed a heavy cargo of grief that would make one cry.

"What matter, white girl?" he asked solicitously. "You got a *hiyu* trouble?"

Between sobs, the silent partner told Natinit many things. In fact she said to Natinit what she had never said to Eddie Blake. Eddie Blake was the grandest, the biggest, darlingest fellow in all the world.

If anything should happen to Eddie Blake, why she would just jump over the side, and be done with it. She would! She would!

The current of her rising emotions swept on and on. Eddie and her father had been partners. She and Eddie had been play-

mates all their days. Why, Eddie had given her her nickname. She had hated the name for years; now she loved it. She wouldn't for worlds be known by any other.

Her nickname?

"Why, just 'cause Ed's a fathom, and I hain't but a shy five foot, he nicked me 'Tenas.' You savvy Tenas, Natinit? It's Indian for something that's terrible little. Tenas Holly—that's my title on the articles."

Natinit sat upon the gunwale, his thick hand to the tiller haft. Natinit was thinking, thinking Indian style, which is by no means white-man style. An Indian lies easily, fluently to an enemy; to a friend, an Indian tells the naked, remorseless truth.

"Skama George is a devil," Natinit broke forth abruptly. "He kill. Skama George has crew of devils. Skama shanghai Eddie Blake because Eddie can shoot brass thing at sun and tell where are.

"Skama go steal furs at Four Mountains. White man who lands at Four Mountains to steal never come off but very dead."

The rosy face of Tenas Holly turned pale, and she gave a despairing cry. Springing to her feet, she began pacing the narrow cockpit.

"More sail, Natinit!" she called, waving her arms aloft. "More sail! Let's bend on a jury tops'l. Oh, this tub!"

Natinit smiled, pointed for Tenas to be seated. "You no worry bad," he said consolingly. "Eddie Blake my friend. I know it when he get shanghai. He says it I have a job on Klatawa. My friend. Look see, white girl."

Natinit held up his right hand, upon the back of which was tattooed the totem of the bear and the thunderbird.

"Natinit is tattooer for tribe of Four Mountain Aleuts," he said proudly. "Some day, I be Shaman. Nigchik, every Four Mountain man know this totem. See."

He leaned toward her and said, half aloud: "When Eddie sleep with shanghai strong medicine, Natinit tattoo the sacred totem on his hand. He my friend, Eddie Blake. Nagichik sees the totem. He knows then Eddie Blake is honest man and good. No kill. What you think, white girl?"

To his surprise, and something to his consternation, Natinit, who knew no mode of affectionate salutation save the rubbing of noses, was made the sudden recipient of a vigorous, and hearty hug. "Clever, Natinit," Tenas extolled. "Clever boy. I and Eddie 'll never forget it. You're some slicker, Natinit."

Now, in the open, the Klatawa beat and beat against contrary winds. Then, suddenly, the breeze went fair, strong. Swiftly they scuttered along.

Cutting in close to the shore of Umnak Island, adjacent to the Island of the Four Mountains, in order to escape the back pull of a strong tide, they encountered fitful, treacherous winds caused by the saw-tooth cuts of the cliffs ahead.

They were sailing an erratic course along a high, rock bank, Tenas at the tiller, when a swirling gale swooped down upon them. As swiftly as she dared, Tenas paid off the yawl, but the boom whipped over, struck the Aleut boy a terrific blow upon the back of the head. Face downward, he lay upon the deck.

Tenas threw the boat up into the wind, knelt, turned the boy upon his back. He had suffered a frightful cut of the scalp. He lay still, and deathly pale under his coppery skin. He was hurt, seemingly very badly hurt.

Bandaging the wound as best she could, she veered the Klatawa, made for a stretch of beach some distance below the rock bank where she saw a couple of native kyaks, or one-man canoes.

In response to her hail, an old Aleut emerged from the brush, stood regarding the newcomers curiously. Finally, in answer to her frantic cries and excited gesticulations, the native climbed leisurely into a canoe and came out.

Tenas, as most islanders do, spoke the Chinook. The old fellow comprehended sufficient of the tongue to follow her. He picked up Natinit's lifeless hand, pointed to the totem, grunting the words, "Four Mountain Aleut."

Tenas let go the Klatawa's hook, and the old native sprawled over the side into his kyak, and made for shore. Presently he returned with a second native in another

canoe. The second man, it was explained, was the shaman, or village medicine man.

The shaman rather ceremoniously examined the wound on Natinit's head. A cunning look passed betwen the medicine man and the old native.

Then the latter proceeded to explain to Tenas that the Aleut boy was bad hurt, that the injured man would have to be brought ashore, placed in an igloo, and a strong *tomanawous* spell said over him for three successive days. Otherwise, he would die.

The silent partner sat upon the gunwale and pondered. Three days. Three whole days. A mighty measure of disaster might be dealt out to Eddie Blake in three days.

"All right," she said. "Take Natinit ashore. And give him the best of care. If there is anything to pay—"

The shaman and the old native promptly loaded Natinit into the larger of the two kyaks, and make off.

Tenas paused a moment to study her charts. Then she hauled in the anchor, shook out the jigger sail on the mizzenmast until it caught the wind and gave the Klatawa a sheer.

On went the little partner, alone, in a rising, turbulent sea, toward the Island of the Four Mountains.

Many times the stanch little ship threatened to broach to. With all her determined strength she held the craft into the quartering gale. Her hands grew numb from the strain and grip upon the tiller haft.

She tried making the tiller fast to a cleat with a bit of line, but a sudden gust of wind nearly capsized her. She cast off the line, locked her stiff fingers about the thick oak stem.

The wind blowing contrariwise off the Island of the Four Mountains, she was forced to beat far to sea. Then she came about, made for lee. It was dark when the Klatawa slid into the syrupy smoothness of the bay at the foot of one of the four mountains. In tacking she had maneuvered unwittingly in a way that brought her to anchor at a spot on the side of the island opposite from where the Explorer had dropped its hook.

Natinit had talked to her much of his native village, its location, the number of the igloos, the prowess of the braves, and their triumphs in war. She suddenly recalled with some misgivings that he had hinted at the existence of an ancient feud between his people and the natives of Umnak. In her anxiety over Eddie's fate, she had left the faithful Natinit in the hands of his hereditary enemies.

But, she reflected, she could not have done otherwise. The boy's life might have paid the price had she carried him on. She felt guilty, though her reason said that she had done the best thing under the circumstances.

The Aleut boy had told her of a perennial stream that ran through the village, tumbled over a rock ledge into the sea. Near where she had come to anchor such a turbulent brook emptied into the bay, as she could tell from the sound of falling water.

She made ready to go ashore. First she strapped her father's old six-shooter about her slender waist. She cocked her head, listened to the noise of the tumbling brook. Leaning, she extricated from her stocking the powder-puff and the little round mirror, placed them in a locker.

Then she slid the dingy from the stern of the Klatawa, climbed into it, sculled the craft swiftly ashore, beached it.

Her keen eyes studied the beach and bank. There was no sign of a trail or path inland. But there was the brook. More than once she had waded the San Juan Island trout streams with Eddie. There was a trail—the brook.

For a distance she crawled along the bank of the stream. Then she encountered a thicket of overhanging brush and the thorned Devil's Club. Boldly she plunged into the stream.

Once she walked off a ledge of rock into a deep hole. She struck out, swam across, climbed again onto the rocks. Plucking a bit of dry moss from an overhanging alder, she wiped off the old six gun, reflecting with satisfaction that modern cartridges are impervious to any but a prolonged submersion in water.

Falling, scrambling, swimming again and again, she made her way up the stream-bed.

After what seemed an interminable time, she emerged into the open.

Lights showed in several igloos. There was the tall totem pole, and there immediately by it was the imposing house of the Tyee Nagichik.

The heavy six-shooter in her hand, she made her way cautiously forward and peeped into the window.

An old Aleut with white hair and beard, sat before a Russian stove. As the girl continued to watch, the old man arose, took down from a peg on the wall what looked like the sweat band of a man's hat. This, however, was not a bit of tanned leather, but rawhide.

Seating himself before the fire, the tyee began turning the leather circle before the flames, his slant, black eyes glinting about cruelly.

Having dried the circlet thoroughly he arose, stepped to the door, struck thrice upon a copper gong with a short stick.

At the sound of running footsteps, Tenas crouched against the wall of the igloo. Three squat, powerfully built natives entered the igloo, saluted the old man respectfully. In the Chinook jargon, the old tyee bade the tribesmen to bring another crown, pointing as he spoke to the leather circlet that he held in his hand. "Get a 'skookum capit,'" he ordered.

"Skookum capit," means a strong crown.

"In the morning," added the tyee, "we put the *moxt kopie deaub* (two white devils) to the torture."

Torture! The Aleut crown.

Her heart went sick. She had heard of the ingenious, fiendish torture known as the Aleut crown.

Two white devils. Her woman's intuition told her that Eddie would be one of these. Natinit's charm had failed.

Then she knew that it had been a grievous blunder to leave the Aleut boy on Umnak Island. Natinit, a shaman to be, could have saved Eddie. Natinit, in the flesh, telling his story, could have saved Eddie.

The hocus-pocus of the tattooed totem—why, any old "bilge wash" on Seattle water-front could have done that needle job, and Nagichik had been wise enough to know it.

Torture the two white devils in the morning. Many hours remained before morning.

She was resolved. She would sail back to Umnak, bring Natinit even though wounded, ill, make him speak, plead for Eddie Blake.

Swiftly she ran across the open to where the brook entered the wood. She was about to wade into the stream when a hand thrust itself out of the darkness, fastened upon her arm. Like a flash she twisted, raised the heavy six-shooter—fired. The weapon was twisted from her grasp, and strong hands laid themselves upon her.

A native lay groaning upon the earth. The bullet from the old six-shooter had found a mark. Two other Aleuts held her in a crushing grip. As if she had been a doll, one of these lifted her, crushed her frail body to him, ran across the open toward the igloo of Tyee Nagichik.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ORDEAL OF THE CROWN.

WHEN the first rays of dawn entered the portlike window of the prison igloo, Eddie awakened from fitful sleep. It seemed even then that he could not be awake, but in the throes of some horrid nightmare.

Grinning sardonically, directly at him, was the ghastly, distorted countenance of Lallie Uku. Lallie Uku was dead of a fractured skull. A space beyond the body of Lallie Uku, lay a twisted heap that, in the flesh, had been called Skamowaka. Dead, also dead.

The seven-devil vow of Nagichik, surely, inexorably, was coming to its fruition. Of the crew of the Explorer that had come upon this predatory voyage, there remained but two alive, Skama George and Eddie Blake. Of these two, there remained but one to suffer the Aleut's savage reprisal—Eddie Blake.

Presently the door of the prison igloo opened. A deep-chested native entered, turned the bodies of Skamowaka and Lallie

Uku carelessly with his foot, grunted, reached and with ungentle grasp hauled Eddie to his feet.

Then the brave deftly freed the bonds from about the white boy's wrists and ankles. At the first step, Eddie plunged forward upon his face. His benumbed limbs had refused their function.

While the Aleut stood alertly over him, Eddie rubbed and pounded the blood back into his legs and arms. Then, with the aid of the native, he arose, went staggering into the open.

The Aleut guard led the white prisoner toward the large igloo of the tyee. In a circle within, upon the floor, sat Nagichik, the shaman, and a dozen sage counselors of the tribe.

The powwow which ensued was conducted in the Aleutian tongue, no word of which was intelligible to the white man. For the greater part the harrangue was heated, violent. In the midst of what was patently a violent denunciation of himself, Eddie received a sharp blow in the face from a wrinkled and withered old savage who flailed his arms about, and clawed the air like a maniac.

Then the council settled into more sedate and dignified deliberation. Shortly the verdict was announced to Eddie in Chinook.

As coolly as if he were announcing breakfast, Nagichik spoke: "You get some bad torture, white chief," said the tyee. "You come steal seal hide. I swear it a devil oath white man comes to steal, stays to suffer and die. Torture first for you, white man, then—you die."

Sharply, Tyee Nagichik struck his palms together. The door of the igloo opened. Two braves entered, between them a tiny, pale-faced girl.

At sight of Eddie Tenas gave a wild scream, jerked free from her guards, ran and flung her arms about Eddie's neck.

With guttural, savage cries, her jailers tore her from the white man's embrace. Nagichik, the shaman, the old counselors, shook their heads sagely at one another, muttered a few words. This white girl was then, as they had suspected, part and parcel of the thieving crew of the Explorer.

Tenas was led into the middle of the circle where she stood, trembling violently. Her hearing was swift, conclusive.

The klootchman was a white klootchman. She was of the tribe of the white thief. When she had run with glad cries to the white thief's embrace, she had sentenced herself, for she had addressed him with endearing terms, had stroked his hair, had kissed him after the foolish white man's custom. Also, to complete the case against her, she had resisted capture, had shot an Aleut brave through the shoulder.

The sentence: "White klootchman, *tillicum* of the white thief, maybe his *malieh* (married to, or about to be married), for you there shall be torture—then death."

For an instant the white girl's blue eyes widened with terror. Slowly she turned toward Eddie Blake. He held forth his arms. She ran sobbing to their shelter.

"No matter, Eddie. No use playing off any girl tricks now. You know why I sailed the Klatawa to the north. It's 'cause I love you, Eddie. Kiss me, Eddie. Maybe for the last. Eddie, lover."

As if to refine upon the cruelty of the ordeal, the Aleuts, as a prelude to the torture, gave a great feast. Chunks of baked and kippered salmon were handed about. A veritable bread-line formed, passed by a great cooking basket presided over by a cranky and officious old klootchman.

As the tribesmen passed by the old klootchman handed each a piece of *piah sapolil*, a bread made from fern roots, and a generous helping of *mowitch* (venison). Also, from another great cooking basket, the braves dipped out portions of mussel stew in large clam shells which they sipped with audible satisfaction.

Between courses, or, rather, between returns to the cooking baskets, the young braves danced the tribal dances, garbed in hideous bear's head or wolf's head masks.

One young Aleut threw the tribe into paroxysms of appreciative laughter. With a cunningly made, enormous eagle's head mask upon his head and shoulders, he would occasionally swoop down upon the two white victims, peck them viciously with his

artificial thunderbird's beak made of a bit of fashioned walrus tusk ivory.

At last the feasting and the dancing were over. The tribe formed itself in a large circle. The shaman, as major-domo, stepped to the center to supervise the torture.

At his command, a young brave came forward with two circlets of rawhide, the bits of leather that Old Nagichik had so solicitously dried before the fire of the Russian stove.

One of the leather circlets, with some difficulty, was drawn down over Eddie's head. Then followed a great to-do. The second circlet was much too large to fit about the brow of the white girl.

A toothless, gibbering hag of a klootchman ran forward eagerly, slit the leather with a knife, searched forth some bits of rawhide from her war-bag, spliced the circle to a proper size.

There are recorded indisputably authentic cases in which the Aleut crown has been known to crush the skulls of victims under torture. The dried crown is fitted tightly over the head and forehead of the prisoner. Then oil of seal blubber is applied to the leather. Slowly, with crushing, vicelike force, the leather begins to shrink, as a rope will shrink when moistened. The suffering of the victim is something exquisite, terrible, and ends with death from a fractured skull, or the merciful surcease of insensibility.

Eddie first was summoned to the center of the circle. He was pale, but walked firmly. As the brave started to readjust the crown upon his head, the white man thrust the native's hand away.

Turning toward Nagichik, Eddie made an impassioned appeal. He was innocent of the charge of thievery. Certainly the little white girl was innocent. He had made many voyages to the north; had never robbed, or mistreated an Aleut. In fact, he had very recently planned to help in a very material manner their fellow tribesman, Natinit.

At mention of the name of the future shaman, Nagichik and the present medicine man started with surprise. The shaman thought for a moment, shook his head, spoke in the Aleut tongue to the chief.

"What the white chief says is a lie," said Nagichik. "The white thief's tongue is as certainly full of lies as a crow's of croakings."

Gesturing earnestly with his bandaged hand, Eddie called the sacred sun god of the Aleuts to witness that he spoke the truth. Natinit, wounded, lay ill on Unmak Island. It was but a short journey. Send for Natinit.

"Lies, all lies. Would Natinit nest with the whelps on Unmak? Since the sun traveled his yellow road, the Unmaks and the men of Four Mountains had been at enmity. Lies."

Nagichik finished by pointing to the white girl. A brave dragged Tenas to the center of the circle, and the officious, toothless, old klootchman, chortling triumphantly, affixed the crown about the blond head.

Then Eddie's caution stampeded. He struck out savagely. Down went the shaman, to stay down.

A dozen braves were upon the white man, but Eddie had a very fairish pile of Aleuts heaped up about him when the old klootchman ran in with a seal-killing stick, fetched him a crack upon the head that laid him quivering.

When he recovered his senses he was upon his feet, supported by two tribesmen. The crown was upon his head. A brave was dabbing it with liberal applications of seal oil.

Also the crown was upon Tenas's fair head. The old klootchman, still mouthing away savagely exultant, was rubbing the oil into the rawhide with her fingers.

Tenas was deathly pale, but she smiled bravely. "Eddie, lover—"

Her tender flesh was becoming livid about the edge of the crown. Apparently she did not sense the hurt, but was gazing as if hypnotized at the white streaks forming beneath the crown on the head of her lover.

Suddenly Tenas screamed out, pointed.

"Eddie; the bandage on your hand! Off with it!"

With his left hand, Eddie freed the blue bandanna, unwrapped the strip of linen, held up the member.

The sacred totem of the bear and the thunderbird.

Out of the mouth of this white tyee had come not lies, but truth. No human hand save the hand of Natinit had placed there the Four Mountain emblem.

With his own knife Nagichik slit the crown from Eddie's head. Reluctantly, the old klootchman obeyed the tyee's stern order, and cut away the bit of rawhide from the head of the white girl.

"Eddie—lover—"

Half whispering the words, Tenas fell into Eddie's arms in a dead faint.

Bearing the limp form in his arms, Eddie followed Tyee Nagichik to the latter's igloo. As he walked, Eddie whispered constantly something into the girl's insensate ear.

Nagichik thought the white tyee must be saying some strong *tomanawous* charm into the girl's unhearing ear. Perhaps he was. In any event, after a time, Tenas opened her eyes, settled them fondly upon Eddie Blake.

Eddie laid her upon the pile of skins in Nagichik's igloo. After a time she sat up, began to rearrange her disordered hair. Suddenly she clapped her hand down in the region of her knee. She flushed slightly, and a queer expression came over her features. "Pshaw," she said, "I left them aboard the Klatawa."

Eddie looked blank.

Nagichik could do too little for his white guests of honor. A special feast was provided for them. Eddie ate rather heartily, considering the extremely narrow margin by which he and Tenas had escaped the fate promised by Nagichik's vow of the seven devils. Tenas partook of but a meager bite of the baked salmon.

Eddie was on the point of dipping up a second clam shell of mussel stew, when a quiet voice sounded in the doorway of the igloo.

There, a bandage of healing kelp leaves about his head, stood Natinit. By one hand Natinit grasped the arm of Skama George, whose face and head was a revolting mass of bruises and contusions.

"The Unmak dogs would hold me prisoner for *pil chickamin* (money ransom)," said Natinit. "I crawl out in dark. I see Explorer ship come by. I steal a kyak. I come under stern of Explorer ship.

"I climb on deck. I take a pin from the rail. Skama George is at the wheel. Here he is, the *hiyu deaub*."

Natinit pointed to his prisoner.

Immediately the council reconvened. Skama George was sentenced to the torture of the crown—death. Four braves led him from the presence of the tyee.

Eddie and Tenas were bound for home. The old Klatawa seemed to know that the partners were in a hurry, for it fairly tore through the seas, exemplifying nobly its name, which, in the Indian, means "hurry up."

The Klatawa was well down the Straits of Fuca, and nearing the San Juan Islands, when Tenas peered over Eddie's shoulder as he sat studying the chart.

"Where we bound for, Eddie?"

With a thick thumb Eddie pointed at a spot on the chart.

"Port Townsend," he said. "It's a county-seat. They got a court-house there. Likewise, in this court-house they got an old mud-shark that sells weddin' paper. In the town they's a preacher.

"They do say this pastor lays over anybody in these parts for a quick splice, and stanch. There's where we're bound."

Tenas blushed, but she didn't say no.

The Klatawa was making into Townsend harbor. Upon the hill showed the court-house. Also the little white cottage where lived the preacher of splicing renown.

As the Klatawa nosed the dock Eddie ran forward to make fast.

This was her chance. Tenas dove a hand into her stocking, brought forth the little round mirror, and the powder-puff. By the time Eddie had made fast, and had lowered the mains'l, Tenas had camouflaged all the freckles on the bridge of her nose.

She smiled fondly up at her big lover as he reached a hand to help her to the wharf. Hand in hand they made their way toward the court-house on the hill.

(The end.)

Tarzan and the Valley of Luna

by Edgar Rice Burroughs

Author of "A. R. H. the Rider," "Thuvia, Maid of Mars," the *Tarzan* Tales, etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

WHILE on his way to revisit his ape people, Tarzan was instrumental in rescuing Lieutenant Harold Percy Smith-Oldwick, of the Royal Air force, and his companion, Bertha Kircher, from the dangers of the African jungle, in which, during their escape from German territory, they had been obliged to make a forced landing in order to make some slight repairs to the plane.

Tarzan was more or less disturbed in his mind, for while he liked the young English air-man, he felt pretty certain that the woman—with whom the lieutenant was frankly in love—was a German spy. Watching them out of sight from the top of a tall tree, he saw the plane again fall, its propeller-blade broken by contact with a great vulture, whose curiosity had proved fatal to both itself and the plane. Marking as nearly as possible the spot where the airship had gone down, he immediately plunged into the jungle to try to find them.

Hurrying on, he presently came to a pit where a huge black lion was entrapped and, moved by pity and admiration for the splendid beast, released him. Not for many hours did he succeed in finding the place where the plane had come down, then arriving just in time to rescue its passengers from the black lion, who, recognizing him as the one who freed him from the trap, immediately became friendly, and presently went away. There were plenty of other lions and other savage beasts about, however, so, as the plane was now a hopeless wreck, they found a sheltered place to spend the night and prepared to make a camp as secure as possible. It was then that they discovered a strange and disquieting footprint in the soft soil.

The night passed quietly, but toward dawn they were suddenly attacked by a strange tribe of men, accompanied by a pack of lions, which the men used and controlled as we would dogs. Tarzan at the first encounter was knocked unconscious, and when he recovered the Englishman and the girl were gone, and all the attackers had disappeared, but two lions, who were being held at bay by the great black lion, Numa of the Pit. Presently these two attacked, but Tarzan and Numa made short work of them. Tarzan then started off on the trail of his friends, and after some adventures he was amazed to see in the distance a walled city, with domes and towers. Watching from the tree-tops, he was puzzled to note that all the men going to and from the city had all the physical peculiarities of maniacs, though they spoke and acted normally enough, except for their contempt of lions and apparent fear of harmless birds.

Meantime Lieutenant Smith-Oldwick and Bertha Kircher had been carried off by the strange race and had noted their peculiar physical characteristics. No violence had been offered them, however, until after entering the city, when the lieutenant, who had been wounded by a lion when first taken prisoner, became faint from loss of blood and staggered several times. Then, without warning, one of his guards, flew into a sudden maniacal rage, leaped upon the wounded man, bore him to the ground, and, screaming horribly, waved his drawn sword above his head.

CHAPTER X.

AMONG THE MANIACS.

THE others stopped and turned to look upon the encounter with no particular show of interest. It was as though one of the party had paused to readjust a sandal and the others merely awaited until he was ready to march on again.

But if their captors were indifferent, Bertha Kircher was not. The close-set, blazing eyes, the snarling, fanged face, and the frightful screams filled her with horror, while the brutal and wanton attack upon the wounded man aroused within her the

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spirit of protection for the weak that is inherent in all women.

Forgetful of everything other than that a weak and defenseless man was being brutally murdered before her eyes, the girl cast aside discretion and, rushing to Smith-Oldwick's assistance, seized the uplifted sword-arm of the shrieking creature upon the prostrate Englishman.

Clinging desperately to the fellow, she surged backward with all her weight and strength, with the result that she overbalanced him and sent him sprawling to the pavement upon his back. In his efforts to save himself he relaxed his grasp upon the grip of his saber, which had no sooner fallen to the ground than it was seized upon by the girl. Standing erect beside the prostrate form of the English officer, Bertha Kircher, the razor-edged, gleaming weapon grasped firmly in her hand, faced their captors.

She was a brave figure; even her soiled and torn riding-togs and disheveled hair detracted nothing from her appearance. The creature she had felled scrambled quickly to his feet, and in the instant his whole demeanor changed. From demoniacal rage he became suddenly convulsed with hysterical laughter, although it was a question in the girl's mind as to which was the more terrifying. His companions stood looking on with vacuous grins upon their countenances, while he from whom the girl had wrested the weapon leaped up and down, shrieking with laughter.

If Bertha Kircher had needed further evidence to assure her that they were in the hands of a mentally deranged people the man's present actions would have been sufficient to convince her. The sudden uncontrolled rage, and now the equally uncontrolled and mirthless laughter but emphasized the facial attributes of idiocy.

Suddenly realizing how helpless she was in the event that any one of the men sought to overpower her, and moved by a sudden revulsion of feeling that brought on almost a nausea of disgust, the girl hurled the weapon upon the ground at the feet of the laughing maniac, and, turning, kneeled beside the Englishman, who had now dragged himself to one elbow.

"It was wonderful of you," he said, "but you shouldn't have done it. Don't antagonize them; I believe that they are all mad, and you know they say that one should always humor a madman."

She shook her head.

"I couldn't see him kill you," she said.

A sudden light sprang to the man's eyes as he reached out a hand and grasped the girl's fingers.

"Do you care a little now?" he asked. "Can't you tell me that you do—just a bit?"

She did not withdraw her hand from his, but she shook her head sadly.

"Please don't," she said. "I am sorry that I can only like you very much."

The light died from his eyes, and his fingers relaxed their grasp on hers.

"Please forgive me," he asked. "I intended waiting until we got out of this mess and you were safe among your own people. It must have been the shock or something like that, and seeing you defending me as you did. Anyway, I couldn't help it, and, really, it doesn't make much difference what I say now, does it?"

"What do you mean?" she asked quickly.

He shrugged and smiled ruefully.

"I will never leave this city alive," he said. "I wouldn't mention it except that I realize that you must know it as well as I. I was pretty badly torn up by the lion, and this fellow here has about finished me. There might be some hope if we were among civilized people, but here, with these frightful creatures, what care could we get, even if they were friendly?"

Bertha Kircher knew that he spoke the truth, and yet she could not bring herself to an admission that Smith-Oldwick would die.

She was very fond of him; in fact, her great regret was that she did not love him, but she knew that she did not, and that she could not, and only she knew why.

It seemed to her that it could be such an easy thing for any girl to love Lieutenant Harold Percy Smith-Oldwick—an English officer and a gentleman, the scion of an old family and himself a man of ample means, young, good-looking and affable. What more could a girl ask for than to have such a man love her, and that she possessed

Smith-Oldwick's love there was no doubt in Bertha Kircher's mind.

She sighed, and then, laying her hand impulsively on his forehead, she whispered softly:

"Don't give up hope, though. Try to live for my sake, and for your sake I will try to love you."

It was as though new life had suddenly been injected into the man's veins. His face lightened instantly, and, with strength that he himself did not know he possessed, he rose slowly to his feet, albeit somewhat unsteadily. The girl helped him and supported him after he had arisen.

For the moment they had been entirely unconscious of their surroundings, and now, as she looked at their captors, she saw that they had fallen again into their almost habitual manner of stolid indifference, and at a gesture from one of them the march was resumed, as though no untoward incident had occurred.

Bertha Kircher experienced a sudden reaction from the momentary exaltation of her recent promise to the Englishman. She knew that she had spoken more for him than for herself, but now that it was over she realized, as she realized the moment before she had spoken, that it was unlikely she would ever care for him the way he wished. But what had she promised? Only that she would try to love him.

"And now?" she asked herself.

She realized that there might be little hope of their ever returning to civilization. Even if these people should prove friendly and willing to let them depart in peace, how were they to find their way back to the coast? With Tarzan dead, as he fully believed him after having seen his body lying lifeless at the mouth of the cave when she had been dragged forth by her captor, there seemed no power at their command which could guide them safely to the coast.

The two had scarcely mentioned the ape-man since their capture, for each realized fully what his loss meant to them. They had compared notes relative to those few exciting moments of the final attack and capture, and had found that they agreed perfectly upon all that had occurred. Smith-Oldwick had even seen the lion leap upon Tarzan at the instant that the former was awakened by the roars of the charging beasts, and though the night had been dark he had been able to see that the body of the savage ape-man had never moved from the instant that it had come down beneath the beast.

And so, if at other times within the past few weeks Bertha Kircher had felt that her situation was particularly hopeless, she was now ready to admit that hope was absolutely extinct.

The streets were now beginning to fill with the strange men and women of this strange city. Sometimes individuals would notice them and seem to take a great interest in them, and again others would pass with vacant stares, seemingly unconscious of their immediate surroundings and paying no attention whatsoever to the prisoners.

Once they heard hideous screams up a side street, and, looking, they saw a man in the throes of a demoniacal outburst of rage, similar to that which they had witnessed in the recent attack upon Smith-Oldwick. This creature was venting his insane rage upon a child, which he struck and bit repeatedly, pausing only long enough to shriek at frequent intervals. Finally, just before they passed out of sight, the creature raised the limp body of the child high above his head and cast it down with all his strength upon the pavement, and then, wheeling and screaming madly at the top of his lungs, he dashed headlong up the winding street.

Two women and several men had stood looking on at the cruel attack. They were at too great a distance for the Europeans to know whether their facial expressions portrayed pity or rage; but be that as it may, none offered to interfere in behalf of the child.

A few yards farther on a hideous hag leaned from a second-story window, where she laughed and jibbered, and made horrid grimaces at all who passed her. Others went their ways apparently attending to whatever duties called them, as soberly as the inhabitants of any civilized community.

"God," muttered Smith-Oldwick, "what an awful place!"

The girl turned suddenly toward him.

"You still have your pistol?" she asked him.

"Yes," he replied, "I tucked it inside my shirt. They did not search me, and it was too dark for them to see whether I carried any weapons or not. So I hid it in the hope that I might get through with it."

She moved closer to him and took hold of his hand. "Save one cartridge for me, please?" she begged.

Smith-Oldwick looked down at her and blinked his eyes very rapidly. An unfamiliar and disconcerting moisture had come into them. He had realized, of course, how bad a plight was theirs, but somehow it had seemed to affect him only; it did not seem possible that any one could harm this sweet and beautiful girl.

And that she should have to be destroyed —destroyed by him! It was too hideous; it was unbelievable, unthinkable! If he had been filled with apprehension before, he was doubly perturbed now.

"I don't believe I could do it, Bertha," he said.

"Not even to save me from something worse?" she asked.

He shook his head dismally.

"I could never do it," he replied.

The street that they were following suddenly opened upon a wide avenue, and before them spread a broad and beautiful lagoon, the quiet surface of which mirrored the clear cerulean of the sky. Here the aspect of all their surroundings changed. The buildings were higher and much more pretentious in design and ornamentation. The street itself was paved in mosaics of barbaric but stunningly beautiful design. In the ornamentation of the buildings there was considerable color and a great deal of what appeared to be gold-leaf. In all the decorations there was utilized in various ways the conventional figure of the parrot, and, to a lesser extent, that of the lion and the monkey, but the parrot predominated.

Their captors led them along the pavement beside the lagoon for a short distance, and then through an arched doorway into one of the buildings facing the avenue. Here, directly within the entrance, was a large room furnished with massive benches and tables, many of which were elaborately hand-carved with the figures of the inevitable parrot, the lion, or the monkey.

Behind one of the tables sat a man who differed in no way that the captives could discover, from those who accompanied them. Before him the party halted, and one of the men who had brought them made what seemed to be an oral report. Whether they were before a judge, a military officer, or a civil dignitary they could not know; but evidently he was a man of authority, for, after listening to whatever recital was being made to him, the while he closely scrutinized the two captives, he made a single futile attempt to converse with them, and then issued some curt orders to him who had made the report.

Almost immediately two of the men approached Bertha Kircher, and signaled her to accompany them. Smith-Oldwick started to follow her, but was intercepted by one of their guards. The girl stopped then and turned back, at the same time looking at the man at the table and making signs with her hands, indicating, as best she could, that she wished Smith-Oldwick to remain with her, but the fellow only shook his head negatively and motioned to the guards to remove her.

The Englishman again attempted to follow, but was restrained. He was too weak and helpless to even make an attempt to enforce his wishes. He thought of the pistol inside his shirt and then of the futility of attempting to overcome an entire city with the few rounds of ammunition left to him.

So far, with the single exception of the attack made upon him, they had no reason to believe that they might not receive fair treatment from their captors, and so he reasoned that it might be wiser to avoid antagonizing them until such a time as he became thoroughly convinced that their intentions were entirely hostile. He saw the girl led from the building, and just before she disappeared from his view she turned and waved her hand to him.

"Good luck!" she cried, and was gone.

The lions who had entered the building with the party had, during their examination by the man at the table, been driven from the apartment through a doorway behind him. Toward this same doorway two

of the men now led Smith-Oldwick. He found himself in a long corridor, from the sides of which other doorways opened, presumably into other apartments of the building. At the far end of the corridor he saw a heavy grating beyond which appeared an open court-yard. Into this court-yard the prisoner was conducted, and, as he entered it with the two guards, he found himself in an opening which was bounded by the inner walls of the building.

It was in the nature of a garden in which a number of trees and flowering shrubs grew. Beneath several of the trees were benches, and there was a bench along the south wall; but what aroused his most immediate attention was the fact that the lions who had assisted in their capture, and who had accompanied them upon the return to the city, lay sprawled about upon the ground or wandered restlessly to and fro.

Just inside the gate his guard halted. The two men exchanged a few words and then turned and reentered the corridor. The Englishman was horror-stricken as the full realization of his horrible plight forced itself upon his tired brain. He turned and seized the grating in an attempt to open it and gain the safety of the corridor, but he found it securely locked against his every effort, and then he called aloud to the retreating figures of the men within.

The only reply he received was a high-pitched, mirthless laugh, and then the two passed through the doorway at the far end of the corridor, and he was alone with the lions.

CHAPTER XI.

A STRANGE MEETING.

IN the meantime Bertha Kircher was conducted the length of the plaza toward the largest and most pretentious of the buildings surrounding it. This edifice covered the entire width of one end of the plaza. It was several stories in height, the main entrance being approached by a wide flight of stone steps, the bottom of which was guarded by enormous stone lions, while at the top there were two pedestals flanking the entrance and of the same height, upon the top of each of which was the stone image of a large parrot.

As the girl neared these latter images she saw that the capital of each column was hewn into the semblance of a human skull upon which the parrot perched. Above the arched doorway and upon the walls of the building were the figures of other parrots, of lions and of monkeys. Some of these were carved in bas-relief; others were delineated in mosaics, while still others appeared to have been painted upon the surface of the wall.

The colorings of the last were apparently much subdued by age, with the result that the general effect was soft and beautiful. The sculpturing and mosaic work were both finely executed, giving evidence of a high degree of artistic skill. Unlike the first building into which she had been conducted, the entrance to which had been doorless, massive doors closed the entrance, which she now approached.

In the niches formed by the columns which supported the door's arch, and about the base of the pedestals of the stone parrots, as well as in various other places on the broad stairway, lolled some score of armed men. The tunics of these were all of a vivid yellow, and upon the breast and back was embroidered the figure of a parrot.

As she was conducted up the stairway one of these yellow-coated warriors approached and halted her guides at the top of the steps. Here they exchanged a few words, and while they were talking the girl noticed that he who had halted them, as well as those whom she could see of his companions, appeared to be, if possible, of a lower mentality then her original captors.

Their coarse, bristling hair grew so low upon their foreheads as, in some instances, to almost join their eyebrows, while the irises were smaller, exposing more of the white of the eye-ball.

After a short parley the man in charge of the doorway, for such he seemed to be, turned and struck upon one of the panels with the butt of his spear, at the same time calling to several of his companions, who rose and came forward at his command. Soon the great doors commenced slowly to swing creakingly open, and presently, as

they separated, the girl saw behind them the motive force which operated the massive doors—to each door a half-dozen naked negroes.

At the doorway her two guards were turned back, and their places taken by a half-dozen of the yellow-coated soldiery. These conducted her through the doorway which the blacks, pulling upon heavy chains, closed behind them. And as the girl watched them she noted with horror that the poor creatures were chained by the neck to the doors.

Before her led a broad hallway in the center of which was a little pool of clear water. Here again, in floor and walls, was repeated in new and ever-changing combinations and designs, the parrots, the monkeys, and the lions, but now many of the figures were of what the girl was convinced must be gold. The walls of the corridor consisted of a series of open archways through which, upon either side, other spacious apartments were visible.

The hallway was entirely unfurnished, but the rooms on either side contained benches and tables. Glimpses of some of the walls revealed the fact that they were covered with hangings of some colored fabric, while upon the floors were thick rugs of barbaric design, and the skins of black lions and beautifully marked leopards.

The room directly to the right of the entrance was filled with men wearing the yellow tunics of her new guard, while the walls were hung with numerous spears and sabers. At the far end of the corridor a low flight of steps led to another doorway. Here the guard was again halted. One of the guards at this doorway, after receiving the report of one of those who accompanied her, passed through the door, leaving them standing outside. It was fully fifteen minutes before he returned, when the guard was again changed and the girl conducted into the chamber beyond.

Through three other chambers and past three more massive doors, at each of which her guard was changed, the girl was conducted before at last she was ushered into a comparatively small room, back and forth across the floor of which paced a man in a scarlet tunic, upon the front and back of which was embroidered an enormous parrot, and upon whose head was a barbaric headdress surmounted by a stuffed parrot.

The walls of this room were entirely hidden by hangings upon which hundreds, even thousands, of parrots were embroidered. Inlaid in the floor were golden parrots, while as thickly as they could be painted upon the ceiling were brilliant-hued parrots with wings outspread as though in the act of flying.

The man himself was larger of stature than any she had yet seen within the city. His parchmentlike skin was wrinkled with age, and he was much fatter than any other of his kind that she had seen. His bared arms, however, gave evidence of great strength, and his gait was not that of an old man. His facial expression denoted almost utter imbecility, and he was quite the most repulsive human creature that ever Bertha Kircher had looked upon.

For several minutes after she was conducted into his presence he appeared not to be aware that she was there, but continued his restless pacing to and fro. Suddenly, without the slightest warning, and while he was at the far end of the room from her, with his back toward her, he wheeled and rushed madly at her. Involuntarily the girl shrank back, extending her open palms toward the frightful creature as though to hold him aloof, but a man upon either side of her, the two who had conducted her into the apartment, seized her and held her.

Although he rushed violently toward her, the man stopped before her without touching her. For a moment his horrid white-rimmed eyes glared searchingly into her face, immediately following which he burst into maniacal laughter. For two or three minutes the creature gave himself over to merriment, and then, stopping as suddenly as he had commenced to laugh, he fell to examining the prisoner. He felt of her hair, her skin, the texture of the garment she wore, and by means of signs made her understand that she was to open her mouth. In the latter he seemed much interested, calling the attention of one of the guards to her canine teeth, and then baring his own sharp fangs for the prisoner to see.

Presently he fell to pacing to and fro across the floor again, and it was fully fifteen minutes before he again noticed the prisoner, and then it was to issue a curt order to her guards, who immediately conducted her from the apartment.

The guards now led the girl through a series of corridors and apartments to a narrow stone stairway, which led to the floor above, finally stopping before a small door where stood a naked negro armed with a spear. At a word from one of her guards the negro opened the door and the party passed into a low-ceiled apartment, the windows of which immediately caught the girl's attention through the fact that they were heavily barred.

The room was furnished similarly to those that she had seen in other parts of the building; the same carved tables and benches, the rugs upon the floor, the decorations upon the walls, although in every respect it was simpler than anything she had seen on the floor below. In one corner was a low couch covered with a rug similar to those on the floor, except that it was of a lighter texture, and upon this sat a woman.

As Bertha Kircher's eyes alighted upon the occupant of the room the girl gave a little gasp of astonishment, for she recognized immediately that here was a creature more nearly of her own kind than any she had before seen within the city's walls. An old woman it was who looked at her through faded blue eyes, sunken deep in a wrinkled and toothless face. But the eyes were those of a sane creature, and the wrinkled face was the face of a white woman.

At sight of the girl the woman rose and came forward, her gait so feeble and unsteady that she was forced to support herself with a long staff, which she grasped in both her hands. One of the guards spoke a few words to her and then the men turned and left the apartment. The girl stood just within the door, waiting in silence for what might next befall her.

The old woman crossed the room and stopped before her, raising her weak and watery eyes to the fresh young face of the newcomer. Then she scanned her from head to foot, and once again the old eyes returned to the girl's face. Bertha Kircher, on her part, was not less frank in her survey of the little old woman. It was the latter who spoke first. In a thin, cracked voice she spoke hesitatingly, falteringly, as though she were using unfamiliar words and speaking a strange tongue.

"You are from the outer world?" she said in English. "God grant that you may speak and understand this tongue."

"English?" the girl exclaimed. "Yes, of course, I speak English."

"Thank God!" cried the little old woman. "I did not know whether I myself might speak it so that another could understand. For sixty years I have spoken only their accursed gibberish. For sixty years I have not heard a word in my native language. Poor creature! Poor creature!" she mumbled. "What accursed misfortune threw you into their hands?"

"You are an English woman?" asked Bertha Kircher. "Did I understand you aright that you are an English woman and have been here for sixty years?"

The old woman nodded her head affirmatively. "For sixty years I have never been outside of this palace. Come," she said, stretching forth a bony hand, "I am very old and cannot stand long. Come and sit with me on my couch."

CHAPTER XII.

THE OLD QUEEN.

THE girl took the proffered hand and assisted the old lady back to the opposite side of the room, and when she was seated the girl sat down beside her.

"Poor child! Poor child!" moaned the old woman. "Far better to have died than to have let them bring you here. At first I might have destroyed myself, but there was always the hope that some one would come who would take me away, but none ever comes. Tell me how they got you?"

Very briefly the girl narrated the principal incidents which led up to her capture by some of the creatures of the city.

"Then there is a man with you in the city?" asked the old woman.

"Yes," said the girl, "but I do not know where he is nor what are their intentions

in regard to him. In fact, I do not know what their intentions toward me are."

"No one might even guess," said the old woman. "They do not know themselves from one minute to the next what their intentions are, but I think you can rest assured, my poor child, that you will never see your friend again."

"But they haven't slain you," the girl reminded her, "and you have been their prisoner, you say, for sixty years."

"No," replied her companion, "they have not killed me, nor will they kill you, though God knows before you have lived long in this horrible place you will beg them to kill you."

"Who are they?" asked Bertha Kircher. "what kind of people? They differ from any that I have ever seen. And tell me, too, how you came here?"

"It was long ago," said the old woman, rocking back and forth on the couch. "It was long ago. Oh, how long it was! I was only twenty then. Think of it, child! Look at me. I have no mirror other than my bath. I cannot see what I look like, for my eyes are old, but with my fingers I can feel my old and wrinkled face, my sunken eyes and these flabby lips drawn in over toothless gums. I am old and bent and hideous, but then I was young, and they say that I was beautiful. No, I will not be a hypocrite, I was beautiful. My glass told me that. My father was a missionary in the interior, and one day there came a band of Arabian slave-raiders.

"They took the men and women of the little native village where my father labored, and they took me, too. They did not know much about our part of the country, so they were compelled to rely upon the men of our village, whom they had captured, to guide them. They told me that they had never before been so far south, and that they had heard there was a country rich in ivory and slaves west of us. They wanted to go there, and from there they would take us north, where I was to be sold into the harem of some black sultan.

"They often discussed the price that I would bring, and that that price might not lessen they guarded me jealously from one another, so the journeys were made as little fatiguing for me as possible. I was given the best food at their command, and I was not harmed.

But after a short time, when we had reached the confines of the country with which the men of our village were familiar and had entered upon a desolate and arid desert waste, the Arabs realized at last that we were lost. But still they kept on ever toward the west, crossing hideous gorges and marching across the face of a burning land beneath the pitiless sun. The poor slaves they had captured were, of course, compelled to carry all the camp equipage and loot, and thus heavily burdened, half starved and without water, they soon commenced to die like flies.

"We had not been in the desert land long before the Arabs were forced to kill their horses for food, and when we reached the first gorge, across which it would have been impossible to transport the animals, the balance of them were slaughtered and the meat loaded upon the poor, staggering blacks who still survived.

"Thus we continued for two more days, and now all but a few blacks were dead and the Arabs themselves had commenced to succumb to hunger and thirst, and the intense heat of the desert. As far as the eye could reach back toward the land of plenty from whence we had come, our route was marked by circling vultures in the sky and by the bodies of the dead who lay down in the trackless waste for the last time. The ivory had been abandoned, tusk by tusk, as the blacks gave out, and along that trail of death was strewn the camp equipage and the horse trappings of a hundred men.

"For some reason the Arab chief favored me to the last, possibly with the idea that of all his other treasure I could be most easily transported, for I was young and strong, and after the horses were killed I had walked and kept up with the best of the men. We English, you know, are great walkers, while these Arabians had never walked since they were old enough to ride a horse.

"I cannot tell you how much longer we kept on, but at last, with our strength almost gone, a handful of us reached the bottom of a deep gorge. To scale the oppo-

site side was out of the question, and so we kept on down along the sands of what must have been the bed of an ancient river, until finally we came to a point where we looked out upon what appeared to be a beautiful valley, in which we felt assured that we would find game in plenty.

" By then there were only two of us left —the chief and myself. I do not need to tell you what the valley was, for you found it in much the same way as did I. So quickly were we captured that it seemed they must have been waiting for us, and I learned later that such was the case, just as they were waiting for you.

" As you came through the forest you must have seen the monkeys and parrots, and since you have entered the palace how constantly these animals and the lions are used in the decorations. At home we were all familiar with talking-parrots who repeated the things that they were taught to say, but these parrots are different: they all talk in the same language that the people of the city use, and they say that the monkeys talk to the parrots and the parrots fly to the city and tell the people what the monkeys say. And although it is hard to believe, I have learned that this is so, for I have lived here among them for sixty years in the palace of their king.

" They brought me, as they brought you, directly to the palace. The Arabian chief was taken elsewhere. I never knew what became of him. Ago the XXV was king then. I have seen many kings since that day. He was a terrible man; but, then, they are all terrible."

" What is the matter with them?" asked the girl.

" They are a race of maniacs," replied the old woman. " Had you not guessed it? Among them are excellent craftsmen and good farmers, and a certain amount of law and order, such as it is.

" They reverence all birds, but the parrot is their chief deity. There is one who is held here in the palace in a very beautiful apartment. He is their god of gods. He is a very old bird. If what Ago told me when I came is true, he must be nearly three hundred years old by now. Their religious rites are revolting in the extreme, and I believe that it may be the practise of these rites through ages that has brought the race to its present condition of imbecility.

" And yet, as I said, they are not without some redeeming qualities. If legend may be credited, their forbears—a little handful of men and women who came from somewhere out of the north and became lost in the wilderness of central Africa—found here only a barren, desert valley. To my own knowledge rain seldom, if ever, falls here, and yet you have seen a great forest and luxuriant vegetation outside of the city as well as within. This miracle is accomplished by the utilization of natural springs which their ancestors developed, and upon which they have improved to such an extent that the entire valley receives an adequate amount of moisture at all times.

" Ago told me that many generations before his time the forest was irrigated by changing the course of the streams which carried the spring water to the city, but that when the trees had sent their roots down to the natural moisture of the soil and required no further irrigation, the course of the stream was changed and other trees were planted. And so the forest grew until to-day it covers almost the entire floor of the valley except for the open space where the city stands. I do not know that this is true. It may be that the forest has always been here, but it is one of their legends, and it is borne out by the fact that there is not sufficient rainfall here to support vegetation.

" They are peculiar people in many respects, not only in their form of worship and religious rites, but also in that they breed lions as other people breed cattle. You have seen how they use some of these lions, but the majority of them they fatten and eat. At first, I imagine, they ate lion meat as a part of their religious ceremony, but after many generations they came to crave it so that now it is practically the only flesh they eat. They would, of course, rather die than eat the flesh of a bird, nor will they eat monkey's meat, while the herbivorous animals they raise only for milk, hides, and flesh for the lions. Upon the south side of the city are the corrals and

pastures where the herbivorous animals are raised. Boar, deer, and antelope are used principally for the lions, while goats are kept for milk for the human inhabitants of the city."

"And you have lived here all these years," exclaimed the girl, "without ever seeing one of your own kind?"

The old woman nodded affirmatively.

"For sixty years you have lived here," continued Bertha Kircher, "and they have not harmed you?"

"I did not say they had not harmed me," said the old woman; "they did not kill me, that is all."

"What"—the girl hesitated—"what," she continued at last, "was your position among them? Pardon me," she added quickly, "I think I know, but I should like to hear from your own lips, for whatever your position was mine will doubtless be the same."

The old woman nodded. "Yes," she said, "doubtless; if they can keep you away from the women."

"What in the world do you mean?" asked the girl.

"For sixty years I have never been allowed near a woman. They would kill me, even now, if they could reach me. The men are frightful, God knows they are frightful! But Heaven keep you from the women!"

"You mean," asked the girl, "that the men will not harm me?"

"Ago the XXV made me his queen," said the old woman. "But he had many other queens; nor were they all human. He was not murdered for ten years after I came here. Then the next king took me, and so it has been always. I am the oldest queen now. Very few of their women live to a great age. Not only are they constantly liable to assassination but, owing to their subnormal mentalities, they are subject to periods of depression, during which they are very likely to destroy themselves."

She turned suddenly and pointed to the barred windows. "You see this room," she said, "with the black eunuch outside? Wherever you see these you will know that there are women; for, with very few exceptions, they are never allowed out of captivity. They are considered, and really are more violent than the men."

CHAPTER XIII.

METAK, SON OF HEROG XVI.

FOR several minutes the two sat in silence, and then the younger woman turned to the older.

"Is there no way to escape?" she asked.

The old woman pointed again to the barred windows and then to the door, saying, "And there is the armed eunuch. And if you should pass him, how could you reach the street? And if you reached the street, how could you pass through the city to the outer wall? And even if, by some miracle, you should gain the outer wall, and, by another miracle, you should be permitted to pass through the gate, could you ever hope to traverse the forest where the great black lions roam and feed upon men?

"No!" she exclaimed, answering her own question, "there is no escape, for after one had escaped from the palace and the city and the forest, it would be but to invite death in the frightful desert land beyond.

"In sixty years you are the first to find this buried city. In a thousand no denizen of this valley has ever left it, and within the memory of man, or even in their legends, none had found them prior to my coming, other than a single warlike giant, the story of whom has been handed down from father to son.

"I think from the description that he must have been a Spaniard, a giant of a man in buckler and helmet, who fought his way through the terrible forest to the city gate, who fell upon those who were sent out to capture him and slew them with his mighty sword. And when he had eaten of the vegetables from the gardens, and the fruit from the trees, and drank of the water from the stream, he turned about and fought his way back through the forest to the mouth of the gorge. But though he escaped the city and the forest he did not escape the desert. For the legend runs that the king, fearful that he would bring others to attack them, sent a party after him to slay him.

"For three weeks they did not find him, for they went in the wrong direction, but at last they came upon his bones, picked clean by the vultures, lying a day's march up the same gorge through which you and I entered the valley. I do not know," continued the old woman, "that this is true. It is just one of their many legends."

"Yes," said the girl, "it is true. I am sure it is true, for I have seen the skeleton and the corroded armor of this great giant."

At this juncture the door was thrown open without ceremony and a negro entered bearing two flat vessels, in which were several smaller ones. These he set down on one of the tables near the women, and without a word turned and left.

With the entrance of the man with the vessels, a delightful odor of cooked food had aroused the realization in the girl's mind that she was very hungry, and at a word from the old woman she walked to the table to examine the viands.

The larger vessels, which contained the smaller ones, were of pottery, while those within them were quite evidently of hammered gold. To her intense surprise she found lying between the smaller vessels a spoon and a fork, which, while of quaint design, were quite as serviceable as any she had seen in more civilized communities. The tines of the fork were quite evidently of iron or steel, the girl did not know which, while the handle and the spoon were of the same material as the smaller vessels.

There was a highly seasoned stew with meat and vegetables, a dish of fresh fruit and a bowl of milk, beside which was a little jug containing something which resembled marmalade. So ravenous was she that she did not even wait for her companion to reach the table, and as she ate she could have sworn that never before had she tasted more palatable food. The old woman came slowly and sat down on one of the benches opposite her.

As she removed the smaller vessels from the larger and arranged them before her on the table a crooked smile twisted her lip as she watched the younger woman eat.

"Hunger is a great leveler," she said with a laugh.

"What do you mean?" asked the girl.

"I venture to say that a few weeks ago you would have been nauseated at the idea of eating cat."

"Cat?" exclaimed the girl.

"Yes," said the old woman. "What is the difference—a lion is a cat."

"You mean I am eating lion now?"

"Yes," said the old woman, "and as they prepare it it is very palatable. You will never tire of it."

Bertha Kircher smiled a trifle dubiously.

"I could not tell it," she said, "from lamb or veal."

"No," said the woman, "it tastes as good to me. But these lions are very carefully kept and very carefully fed, and their flesh is so seasoned and prepared that it might be anything so far as taste is concerned."

And so Bertha Kircher broke her long fast upon strange fruits, lion meat and goat's milk.

Scarcely had she finished when again the door opened, and there entered a yellow-coated soldier. He spoke to the old woman.

"The king," she said, "has commanded that you be prepared and brought to him. You are to share these apartments with me. The king knows that I am not like his other women. He would never have dared put you with them. Herog the XVI has occasional lucid intervals. You must have been brought to him during one of these. Like the rest of them, he thinks that he alone of all the community is sane, but more than once I have thought that the various men with whom I have come in contact here, including the kings themselves, looked upon me as at least less mad than the others. Yet how I have retained my senses all these years is beyond me."

"What do you mean by 'prepare'?" asked Bertha Kircher. "You said that the king had commanded I be prepared and brought to him."

"You will be bathed and furnished with a robe similar to that which I wear."

"Is there no escape?" asked the girl. "Is there no way even in which I can kill myself?"

The woman handed her the fork. "This is the only way," she said, "and you will notice that the tines are very short and blunt."

The girl shuddered and the old woman laid a hand gently upon her shoulder. "He may only look at you and send you away," she said. "Ago the XXV sent for me once, tried to talk with me, discovered that I could not understand him, and that he could not understand me, ordered that I be taught the language of his people, and then apparently forgot me for a year. Sometimes I do not see the king for a long period. There was one king who ruled for five years whom I never saw. There is always hope; even I, whose very memory has doubtless been forgotten beyond these palace walls, still hope, though none knows better how futilely."

The old woman led Bertha Kircher to an adjoining apartment, in the floor of which was a pool of water. Here the girl bathed, and afterward her companion brought her one of the clinging garments of the native women and adjusted it about her figure. The material of the robe was of a gauzy fabric, which accentuated the rounded beauties of the girlish figure.

"There," said the old woman, as she gave a final pat to one of the folds of the garment, "you are a queen indeed!"

The girl looked down at her naked breasts and but half-concealed limbs in horror. "They are going to lead me into the presence of men in this half-nude condition?" she exclaimed.

The old woman smiled her crooked smile. "It is nothing," she said. "You will become accustomed to it as did I, who was brought up in the home of a minister of the gospel, where it was considered little short of a crime for a woman to expose her stockinged ankle. By comparison with what you will doubtless see, and the things you may be called upon to undergo, this is but a trifle."

For what seemed hours to the distraught girl, she paced the floor of her apartment, awaiting the final summons to the presence of the mad king. Darkness had fallen, and the oil flares within the palace had been lighted long before two messengers appeared with instructions that Herog demanded her immediate presence and that the old woman, whom they called Xanila, was to accompany her. The girl felt some slight relief when she discovered that she was to have at least one friend with her, however powerless to assist her the old woman might be.

The messengers conducted the two to a small apartment on the floor below. Xanila explained that this was one of the anterooms off the main throne-room in which the king was accustomed to hold court with his entire retinue. A number of yellow-tunicked warriors sat about upon the benches within the room. For the most part their eyes were bent upon the floor, and their attitudes that of moody dejection. As the two women entered several glanced indifferently at them, but for the most part no attention was paid to them.

While they were waiting in the anteroom there entered from another apartment a young man uniformed similarly to the others, with the exception that upon his head was a fillet of gold, in the front of which a single parrot-feather rose erectly above his forehead. As he entered the other soldiers in the room rose to their feet.

"That is Metak, one of the king's sons," Xanila whispered to the girl.

The prince was crossing the room toward the audience-chamber when his glance happened to fall upon Bertha Kircher. He halted in his tracks and stood looking at her for a full minute without speaking. The girl, embarrassed by his bold stare and her scant attire, flushed, and, dropping her gaze to the floor, turned away. Metak suddenly commenced to tremble from head to foot and then, without warning, other than a loud, hoarse scream, he sprang forward and seized the girl in his arms.

Instantly pandemonium ensued. The two messengers who had been charged with the duty of conducting the girl to the king's presence danced, shrieking, about the prince, waving their arms and gesticulating wildly as though they would force him to relinquish her, the while they dared not lay hands upon royalty. The other guardsmen, as though suffering in sympathy the madness of their prince, ran forward screaming and brandishing their sabers.

The girl fought to release herself from the horrid embrace of the maniac, but with his left arm about her he held her as easily

as though she had been but a babe, while with his free hand he drew his saber and struck viciously at those nearest him.

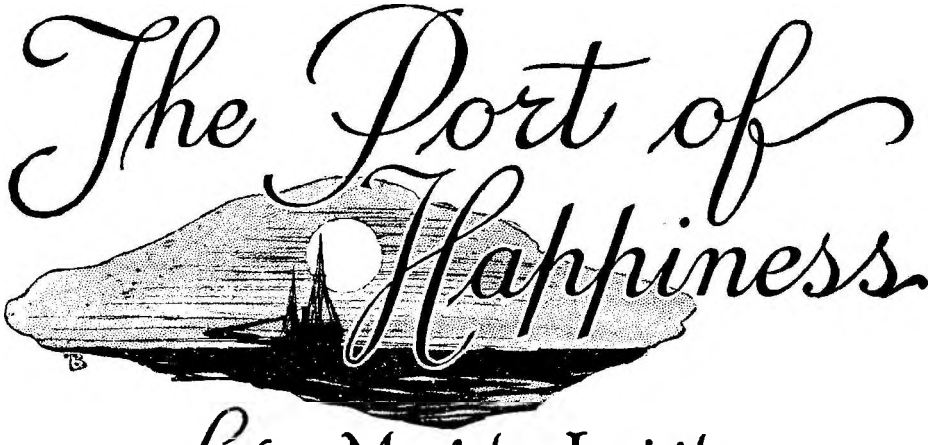
One of the messengers was the first to feel the keen edge of Metak's blade. With a single fierce cut the prince drove through the fellow's collarbone and downward to the center of his chest. With a shrill shriek that rose above the screaming of the other guardsmen, the fellow dropped to the floor, and as the blood gushed from the frightful wound he struggled to rise once more to his feet, and then sank back again and died in a great pool of his own blood.

In the meantime Metak, still clinging desperately to the girl, had backed toward the opposite door. At the sight of the blood two of the guardsmen, as though suddenly roused to maniacal frenzy, dropped their sabers to the floor and fell upon one another with nails and teeth, while some sought to reach the prince and some to defend him. In a corner of the room sat one of the guardsmen laughing uproariously, and just as Metak succeeded in reaching the door and taking the girl through, she thought that she saw another of the men spring upon the corpse of the dead messenger and bury his teeth in its flesh.

During the orgy of madness Xanila had kept closely at the girl's side, but at the door of the room Metak had seen her and, wheeling suddenly, cut viciously at her. Fortunately for Xanila she was half-way through the door at the time, so that Metak's blade but dented itself upon the stone arch of the portal, and then Xanila, guided doubtless by the wisdom of sixty years of similar experiences, fled down the corridor as fast as her old and tottering legs would carry her.

Metak, once outside the door, returned his saber to its scabbard, and lifting the girl bodily from the ground, carried her off in the opposite direction from that taken by Xanila.

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.



by Magda Leigh

THE man who designed that "Crossroads of the Pacific" map is the man who invented wanderlust! In the very middle of the map is a small, insignificant dot. This dot represents Honolulu. From that dot radiate lines to all points of the compass, and each line bears at its far end some magnetic name such as Antofagasta, Coronel, Shanghai, Yokohama, and Petropavlosk.

Petropavlosk! Think of that!

If the Purdette Sugar Company of Hawaii had not had on its walls, copies of that map, this story would never have been written, because Robert Purdette, Jr., might have remained "put."

Bobbie was a human being. Which means that you couldn't just wind him up and make him go through certain tricks like a mechanical toy. He had a mind, which mechanical toys have not. Unfortunately for them, his parents never thought of that. They began winding young Robert the day he was born boy, expecting him to run as per orders.

"He shall be king!" said Mother Purdette, placidly.

"He shall!" came the paternal agreement.

Now, that sounds romantic. But when Mère Purdette said "king," she had no vision of purple and fine linen. Well, perhaps the fine linen, but instead of the purple, the part could be dressed in white flannels, canvas shoes and a sun helmet with silk puggree. Robert, Jr., was to be sugar-king. Why not? Robert, Sr., owned so much sugar-land—glory! If you were to know how much, you might better understand the H. C. L.!

Bobbie was raised in the magnificent Purdette home at Waikiki, to the lullabies of the northeast trade in the palms and papaias and the serenade of the surf booming over the coral reefs. He attended school in Honolulu, followed it up with a course in agriculture at the College of Hawaii, and then went into the hands of tutors. He learned several languages (although pidgin English would have sufficed around the plantations), and table manners and such things. And of course he learned to swim like a native. That follows living at Waikiki as night follows day! He knew every trick of surf-riding and dodging a watery grave in an outrigger canoe.

But aside from his aquatic sports, he did not play much, as a youngster. Playing was not down in Father Purdette's curriculum. Sometimes they let him ride horseback among the plumelike tassels of the cane-fields; and as he grew older, he was taken out to the Purdette lands in the family car, in order that he might make notes on the progress of the crops that were, some day, to be his.

Sometimes, as a special holiday, Bobbie was sent out to the Experiment Station, where were sundry species of cane: "Lahaina," "Rose Bamboo," "Yellow Caledonia." Over these, Bobbie pored in his studies of insect control and the eradication of fungus diseases. Here he made the entertaining acquaintance of leaf-hoppers and their parasites. Just as other boys were taken to the circus to be shown clowns and elephants, Bobbie was taken to the station to be shown soils and fertilizers and to study the propagation of new varieties by hybridization.

He came to believe, deep in his heart, that the motto of the islands, "*Ua mau ke ea o ka aina i ka pono,*" was a mistake. Instead of "The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness," it should have been "The life of the land is perpetuated in sugar."

In spite of this glucose mental diet, Bobbie grew up. Then he was put to work in the Purdette Sugar Company offices on Queen Street, where occasionally he was shifted from department to department. In this manner, they hoped he would digest every item of sugar producing, from the milling of the cane to the shipping of the sugar.

He reached the age of twenty-three while doing office work. And no matter in which department Bobbie worked, always above his desk was a copy of the map showing those aforementioned lines. They began to fascinate Bobbie early in his career—those lines! That dot was such a small dot, and those names were such wonderful names. Petropavlosk—isn't that just grand?

Bobbie, being human and therefore curious, took to investigating those lines. During his evenings in the many-volumed Purdette library, he dug out heavy encyclopedias and read therein. By the time he was out of the office and into the cane-fields, where he was to learn further fertilization, cultivation and irrigation, he had the far ends of the world at his mental finger-tips. Ports—foreign ports—there was a lure to them!

Had Old Man Purdette ever thought of sending Bobbie up to the States for a visit—But he didn't.

When he considered that a change of climate was in order for his son, who, tall, thin and sallow, was altogether a wretched

specimen, he sent him over to Hawaii, to look into Halemaumau, where the seething fires of Kilauea never slumber. Or else, he put him aboard the Claudine, bound for Maui, where he could ascend some 10,000 feet to cool heights and watch the sun rise over Haleakala. He even made it possible, as one choice interlude from sugar-growing, for Bobbie to visit the Kalaupapa leper settlement on Molokai. Think of that for a treat!

This joy-riding among the islands might have satiated, at least to a slight degree, the wanderlust in Bobbie's make-up, had there not always been the eternal vista of tasseled cane. Sugar—everywhere sugar! No wonder he longed for Kamchatka!

Bobbie reached the age of twenty-five without ever having gone east, west, north or south of the Hawaiian Islands. His knowledge of the world, however, extended over considerably more than the 6,449 square miles of the territory.

One beautiful day—and you have only to consult the Promotion Committee's pamphlets to discover that every day in the islands is beautiful— Bobbie Purdette disappeared. Yes, vanished into space. The call of the wall-map had been answered.

He was, be it known, thoroughly courteous about his going. He left a note behind him saying he was terribly sorry to disappoint his people, but he wished to know what lay beyond the horizon. He had an idea there was something over there besides sugar and volcanoes and lepers and leafhoppers. He had taken passage in a ship bound for New Orleans, a windjammer going around Cape Horn, and he hoped to see quite a bit of the world before he reached his destination. He had had places other than New Orleans in his mind, to be sure, but the combination of sailing ship and Cape Stiff was irresistible after the Claudine and Makapuu Point!

We need not look upon the horrible scene this note caused in the Purdette household. Our attention lies with youth and joy unconfined.

Bobbie arrived, one day, in New Orleans. *En route*, he had a glimpse of two or three ports along the west coast of South America that had sounded so inspiring on the map. He did not think much of them. In fact, Paita, the first port-of-call, impressed Bobbie as being a place of hot sands, bad smells and gruesome graveyards. It came as quite a shock to him that, in Antofagasta, the only green things growing were confined to a small plaza outside a wretched hotel and in the cramped gardens of the Quinta Casale. And the fleas—good heavens!

But aside from being nearly frozen and all but shipwrecked, he enjoyed rounding the Horn. This was somewhat of an experience after ferrying around the islands in nothing fiercer than a kona storm.

During the long passage, a change had come over him. The skipper had introduced him to a punching-bag, and Bobbie found that his muscles might be used for more than ornaments. He liked to feel them swell. His chest developed so rapidly that he had to call on the slop chest to provide him with new shirts. The yellow tinge to his skin gave way to a coat of healthy tan. In fact, when he gazed at himself in a mirror, he had a grand and glorious feeling! The punching-bag plus the fresh air caused him to be extravagantly hungry, even for that delicacy of the sea known as "Canned Bill," and he was always delighted when it came time to turn in. By the time he had steadied on his course down Canal Street, Bobbie Purdette was some man!

After all his yearning to see some city bigger than Hilo or Honolulu, Bobbie was disappointed in this, his first experience. There were just more cars—infinitely more people and a terrific lot more noise. And the waters of the Mississippi were brown and muddy. Beneath them was no flashing fin of *kala* or *lae niki*, nor any somber, darting shadow of *pakuikui*. Bobbie wouldn't have confessed it for worlds, but he felt homesick for the islands and their scintillant waters.

It was not long before Bobbie, outwardly as placid as an army mule, but inwardly burning with desire for his great adventure —whatever it might be—cast about for something new. He signed on a fruit-boat as supercargo. There was little to do here but attend to his fruit and his temperatures, and this gave him unlimited time for

reading, something he had not indulged in, during his earlier days. What did he read? Everything from "Pirates by Force" to "In Darkest Africa." Also he punched a bag, gloating over the muscles that kept on developing.

Bobbie stood by the Helena for one year. Then he tired of playing dry-nurse to green bananas. The visits to those ports-of-call along his itinerary began to pall. He added Port Limon, Puerto Barrios, Puerto Cortez, and Belize to Honolulu, and marked them "discarded territory." New Orleans saw him no more. He cast off and got under way for the north, choosing the worst time of year and a small coast steamer for the passage.

The ship in which Bobbie went north was wrecked. He hadn't exactly wished it on the ship, but when she struck off Cape Hatteras, he was tickled to death. He was rescued, half-frozen and badly battered along with the rest of the passengers and crew. He was gloriously happy! What mattered it if he had lost his clothes, his papers, his books—almost his life? He had shaken hands with death off Hatteras!

One morning, after his recovery, he was reading the shipping news in his daily paper. Suddenly he started and looked closer at the sheet. A name—S.S. Hanyangfu—was what had caught his eye. He read on. Before noon, he was on the trail, and the following day, he had a berth as supercargo.

The Hanyangfu was a tramp. She had a habit of poking her blunt nose into a port, gorging herself with cargo, then wallowing away again, probably not to be seen again in those waters for years. Her name originated in China, where she probably once belonged in some respectable trade, carrying cumbersome steel or gossamer silks from one odoriferous port to another.

Her skipper and her flag were British. The old man was a widower named Astruthers, though it isn't pronounced anything like the way it looks. With him on his travels for the past year, he had been carrying all he had left of his family: a young and lovely daughter.

The crew of the Hanyangfu was at Peggy Astruthers's feet, from glory-hole to poop-deck, from engine-room to bridge. Peggy ignored the fact, as far as possible. She had been brought up by a sister of her mother—a woman of breeding and wide education. This aunt had put her through an American college, and when Peggy, through with schooling and ready to settle down with her, had returned to England, it was to find the old lady breathing her last. There were no other living relatives but her own father. Peggy joined him on the tramp ship—as different from her own father as a Pekinese is from a yaller pup.

Peggy had had a year of it—a year of wallowing around the globe in the Hanyangfu. She hated it. She almost hated the men who were her constant companions. It was all crude, elemental.

Peggy had visions—visions cut out and pasted in a scrap-book which she hid in the chest of drawers in her cabin. Those visions had nothing to do with being the wife of a tramp-steamer captain and living, as she put it, in a bunk. It's a shame to have to make one's heroine ordinary—just like any other woman—but one must chronicle facts.

Peggy's scrap-book contained nothing more or less than a home on paper: pictures cut out of furniture catalogs and magazines of home decoration. Peggy had a perfect passion for willow furniture, chintses and potted palms. After tramping the iron decks of the Hanyangfu, day after day, she would lock herself into her cramped quarters and dream over her "home."

Upon this scene—that is, upon the decks of the Hanyangfu, there arrived one day our young adventurer, Bobbie, Jr.

Here is where we cannot possibly follow the lines of well-bred fiction and write: "As he entered the dingy salon at supper-time and was introduced to the fair young maiden opposite him at table, our hero felt his heart leap beneath his brass-buttoned coat, and he murmured 'Girl o' my dreams!'"

It wasn't like that, at all. To be sure, Bobbie's heart did leap and he did murmur. But the leap was a leap of panic, and what he murmured was a horrified "Oh, hell!"

Women! Bobbie knew nothing of them outside of his formal, unbending mother and the seasick women on the Helena!

And here he was face to face—and would continue so to be for months and months—with this low-voiced, gentle-mannered female of the species! I repeat, Bobbie used language his tutors had never taught him.

The Hanyangfu was carrying a large and assorted cargo consigned to certain merchants in China and Japan. She was bound for those wonder ports that had called from the wall map: Shanghai and Yokohama. She was not, however, laden to her plimsoll-mark, for she was to call at Honolulu, *en route*—for sugar.

Isn't fate the darndest thing?

The Hanyangfu, being a low-powered tramp, took her time getting about. She crawled down the latitudes, lazily, taking twice as long and twice as much coal as a mail-boat.

While the Hanyangfu was passing Hatteras—which she did in beastly weather—Bobbie discovered that Miss Astruthers was different from the women he had met throughout the rest of his life. Peggy, in spite of the continually changing angles between rail and rail, never lost her balance or her meals. She actually arouse Bobbie's curiosity. His early habit of studying new species made him eager to study this new brand of woman-creature.

He managed to join her in an unobtrusive way, one day, falling into step at her side.

"Great, isn't it?" he asked, gesturing widely toward the turbulent waters.

"Isn't it?" Peggy made short answer. There was no enthusiasm in her tone.

"Don't you like it?" Bobbie exclaimed. "I thought you did. It doesn't seem to bother you." As the girl continued silent, he went on: "All the other women I've seen at sea were either terrified or ill. It seems strange to find one who is neither. I suppose you've grown up with it, though—this sort of thing."

Peggy laughed shortly. "No. I'm just out of college about a year," she remarked. "Before that, I lived in a house on dry land."

"College!" Bobbie repeated.

"Oh, yes. I went to school. Father didn't bring me up on his palatial steamer!"

"I beg your pardon if my tone implied that!" Bobbie said, contritely. "I'm a duffer. I—I never talked much to women, before, and I suppose it has me rattled."

Peggy shot a quick glance of suspicion at him. There was no doubting him.

"You're a strange sort," the girl finally said. "Just what is it about you that makes you seem so different from other sea-faring men?"

"I daresay," Bobbie replied gravely, "it is that I never began to live until I was twenty-five."

Peggy's smile was strained. "Another story of misspent life or wasted youth?"

"My dad didn't call it that," Bobbie frowned. "You see, I was cut out for something quite different from sea-faring." He suddenly grinned at the idea. "I had a special course in school and at college and afterward, to fit me for a certain thing. But I guess I had a loose foot. I was restless. I wanted to see the world. So I ran away when I was twenty-five."

"When you—were—twenty-five?" Peggy gasped, interested in spite of herself.

"Yes. In a sailing ship. And then I secured berth as supercargo in a fruit ship. And read Henty—and Clarke Russell—and C. H. Claudy—and others!"

"At twenty-five?" There was a twinkle in Peggy's eyes, now.

Bobbie nodded, seriously. "I was not allowed such things at home."

"Not allowed to read boys' books?"

"No. I was given — other things to read."

"But the boys you played with—why didn't you sneak their books? I should have!"

"I never played with other boys."

"But—but you surely didn't play with girls?"

"No. Leaf-hoppers. Nasty little brutes. And just as I was becoming accustomed to them, some fellow discovered a parasite for them, and then I had to become accustomed to the parasite."

"Ugh!" Peggy shuddered. "They don't sound nice."

"Oh, they weren't so bad! But nothing seemed very desirable to me, in those days, except the things I couldn't have. You

don't know how a man starves for the things he is told he cannot have!" Bobbie exclaimed with sudden vehemence.

"I do!" the girl answered quickly. "And I know what it means to be told you have to have something you don't want!"

Bobbie turned toward her but saw that she was vexed with herself for having spoken so frankly to him. Her cheeks were flushed and she was biting her lip.

There was an awkward pause. Then Bobbie said, with almost boyish shyness: "I hope we are going to be friends. I've never had a woman friend, in my life."

Peggy regarded him for a moment. There came a gentle look into her eyes. "He needs mothering," she told herself — and when a woman tells herself that, about some man, she is lost.

That night, late, Peggy pasted up a new room in her paper home. And it was full of toys and books and things for a little boy —a little boy some one loved and wanted to make very happy.

Through the gates and locks of Gatun, Kiraflores and Pedro Miguel, the Hanyangfu made her way. She was out upon the Pacific when Bobbie made a discovery which upset his peace of mind. This was the paternal regard in which Peggy's father held the big, husky chief mate, Jack Finney.

Bobbie had been spending more and more time with Peggy, after their little initial conversation. His opinion of the female sex was undergoing a decided change. And when he saw how Captain Astruthers approved of Finney's attentions to his daughter, Bobbie indulged in quite an emotional interview with his soul. He could scarcely imagine Peggy the wife of a tramp ship's skipper, living, as she had put it to him, in a "squinchy little cabin in a dirty old tramp and growing tanned and weather-beaten and lean and altogether horrid!"

It might all have ended as the captain had planned it should: with ship's bells giving way to wedding bells for Peggy and Jack Finney. It might have ended that way if the mate hadn't taken too much for granted, and if the tropics hadn't got him when he wasn't watching out!

The mate had been regarding Bobbie, day after day, through eyes that were growing more and more hostile. He had disliked the supercargo from the first, because he had realized that Bobbie was "more in Miss Astruthers's class." He resented Bobbie's education. He could talk about things which interested the girl — things about which a tramp-ship's first officer knew nothing—books, music, art—a lot of things not contained in Bowditch.

But most, he resented the supercargo's appearance. Bobbie wore whites in the tropics—and was comfortable in them! Against the collarless shirts and rolled-up sleeves of the rest of the officers, his uniform was a terrific contrast.

If Bobbie's manner toward the others had only been in any way objectionable, the mate would have gladly "stove in his barbered face," as he told the chief. But Bobbie, being a gentleman, was free from snobbishness.

The mate watched the friendship growing between Peggy and the supercargo, and his jealousy boiled. It boiled over, one beautiful night when the Hanyangfu was crossing down the latitudes just north of the islands.

Finney had been standing amidships, glaring at the girl and the supercargo, who were leaning against the rail outside the salon, under a deck light. The mate did not have to stand watch until four in the morning, and he had been accustomed to spending his early evenings either with Peggy or, at least, in trying to be with her. This had been before Bobbie's advent. Now the mate spent his evenings alone, growing more and more sullen.

He had made one or two trips to his room, where there was no prohibition law in order, and had always come back to his dark corner amidships, where he could see without being seen.

At about half past ten, Bobbie left the girl's side and went into the salon. Peggy, unconscious of the eyes smoldering in the dark, walked aft, softly humming. She was brought up sharp, as Finney's voice spoke at her ear.

"Look here! What's goin' on between you two? I'm gettin' tired of seein' you lallygag around with that freight-nurse!"

Peggy's breath drew in, sibilantly.

"How dare you speak to me that way, Jack Finney?" she gasped. "What business is it of yours?"

"Business of mine? Oh, I know we ain't rightly engaged, Peggy, but what do you suppose I've stayed on this old packet for, a whole year, when I could have been skipper somewheres else? You encouraged me and I stuck here. And you knew it. I've spoke to your father and he agreed with me—"

"You! And my father!" There was icy disdain in Peggy's tone. "If my father agreed to anything *you* suggested, it was because he thought you were a man and not the cad you are!"

"Cad, eh?" The mate's laugh was ugly. "I guess anythin' that doesn't manicure its nails looks like a cad to you since that dood came aboard in his starched collars!"

Peggy's cheeks blazed in the dark. "I could scarcely expect *you* to appreciate a gentleman!" she scorned.

"Gentleman!" The mate cursed softly. "Collars and book-learnin' don't make a man! I'd like to smack his soft face for him—only he's smaller 'n me—and hear your 'gentleman' cry for his mama!" He stepped closer to the girl and as he did, the soft perfume of her drifted into his face. He felt suddenly dizzy.

"I seen you first!" he muttered thickly. "I was good enough for you before he came, and I'm not givin' you up to him!" He threw a quick arm about her.

"Let me go!" There was fury, but no fear, in the girl's voice.

"Not till I've kissed some sense into you," the mate answered thickly. He bent his head toward her, when—quite surprisingly, he felt a hand over his face. It was not a soft hand. It didn't in the least feel like a manicured hand. It pressed up and back—and it pressed hard. Finney's arm dropped from the girl's waist, and Peggy stepped aside with a suppressed cry. Against the clear dark, she recognized Bobbie Purdette. In his trim whites, he looked a slender boy beside the big mate.

"He'll be beaten half to death!" she sobbed to herself. "But I can't humiliate him by calling for help!"

She stood back, in agony for her champion, unable to remove her gaze from the two forms dimly outlined against the star-strewn sky.

Finney had jumped backward, away from the hand at his face. He laughed a soft, sinister laugh.

"Now watch shirt sleeves against manicured nails, and see which is the better man!" he gloated to the cowering woman. "Watch me decorate your college chum's face so he won't be so anxious to shave for a few days!"

He lunged forward, his right fist hurtling toward where the supercargo should have been—but wasn't. So great was the force of his blow that it carried him with it. He found nothing in his way but space. He turned furiously, but as he did, Bobbie, who had neatly ducked, landed his right squarely into the mate's face. Finney's chin shot up and a grunt issued from his throat.

Viciously, the mate struck out again. Again he hit space, only to turn back and receive a stinging blow against his jaw.

"Your ugly face is covered with bristles!" Bobbie panted. "It's harder than my punching bag, but not half as clever in getting out of the way!"

A low snarl was his only answer.

Peggy—a sudden elation banishing her horror—saw the mate make a third lunge at the lithe supercargo. Then what followed looked like a white windmill in action. Repelled, yet fascinated—sick, yet jubilant—she watched Bobbie Purdette thrash the big mate.

In what seemed an incredibly short time, she found a dark form lying at her feet—lying there, half sobbing and wholly cursing.

"Better turn in," she heard Bobbie suggesting between labored breaths. "The armistice is signed and Berlin is saved!"

An hysterical laugh rose to her lips. She choked it back. For an instant, she paused. Then she spoke down to the prostrate figure. "Well, I see the better man, Jack Finney!" she said simply, but her passage along the deck to her room was one of jubilant triumph.

A night or so later, the crew was sitting

about, smoking and planning on shore leave in Honolulu. They were due the next day.

Captain Astruthers, seated in the chart-room, was not thinking of shore leave. The glass was behaving in a most extraordinary manner. As the old man put it to the mate, it looked as if the tail end of a typhoon had got lost and was wandering around these latitudes out of its course, raising hell with the barometers!

When the watch was changed at midnight and the second mate took the bridge, there were strange, uncomfortable sounds in the air. It isn't any use to try to describe them. You'd have to hear them, yourself—aye, and *feel* them, to understand what I mean by "uncomfortable."

There was a sea making, long, heavy swells were hissing under the old Hanyangfu, causing her to shudder and make queer, painful sounds, as if she were in agony. Great dank clouds settled down right on the mastheads, filling the atmosphere with a thick smother that made breathing difficult.

Bobbie found himself not only unable to sleep but also unable to remain in his bunk. He seemed suddenly—nervous. Of all things—*nervous!*

He dressed himself and went on deck. But something in the very air he breathed made him return quickly inside. He went into the dining-salon and sat down. He was amazed and provoked to find himself bracing his body against the heavy movements of the lurching Hanyangfu.

"I wish Peggy were out of this!" he muttered savagely. "I don't like it. It's not—nice. A woman has no business in this sort of thing!"

Just then, as if in answer to her name, Peggy opened the door of her room and literally fell into the dining-room. Peggy, who never lost her balance! Bobbie shivered as he sprang to her side and grasped her arm.

The Hanyangfu gave a sudden mean plunge into the trough between two seas. Bobbie threw a protecting arm around the girl, and then nearly lost his balance, himself. Holding a woman in his arms was the most thrilling adventure, yet!

"Come sit down!" he commanded. "You might be thrown and hurt!" He led her to the settee and sat down close beside her.

The old tramp lifted her squat bows into the air and hung poised for a moment. Then she came down—down against a solid wall of water—down with a jar that threw the girl against Bobbie. His arm went around her and held her close.

"This is hell!" he muttered. "This is no place for a woman. I don't see whatever possessed your father to let you come to sea with him. You ought to be safe ashore in your own home—with a baby in your arms! That's where women belong! Women—at sea—in such weather! It's damnable!"

As he spoke, Bobbie was amazed at himself. He realized he was speaking truths his tutors had never taught him, and he was feeling, for the second time in his life, the male's protective instinct for the female. He liked the sensation!

Peggy did not answer him because speech was suddenly impossible. Wind—a howling, smashing gale of it, had come upon the Hanyangfu. Wind—and a cannonade of rain.

Pens such as mine can never hope to be, have written descriptions of gales, typhoons and hurricanes. You may select the best of these, subtract the tail end of the storm described, and apply it to the latitude and longitude wherein the Hanyangfu labored.

Hour after hour, she battled for her very life. Sea after sea swept her—swept her decks clean and battered her stanch house. Forward of the house was nothing but a raging hell of waters, as the Pacific cascaded over the fo'c's'le-head and smashed down upon the well-deck.

Peggy managed to convey one thought to Bobbie and he loved her for it. "Those poor souls below!" she had gasped. "The engineers and the Black Gang!"

"Don't!" Bobbie commanded at her ear. "You must not make yourself miserable thinking of them. They grow used to it, poor devils!"

One minute, the Hanyangfu would make a sickening dive and bury her snout deep in a trough, while only quick work in the engine-room kept her from racing her propeller off. The next minute, it would seem

as if she were sliding, stern-first, backward into the same trough.

Finally, along toward what should have been daybreak, but what was still black, impenetrable dark, there swept toward them a mountain of water which threw the Hanyangfu's bow toward the low sky—and then dropped it—twisted the steamer in a gigantic, liquid grasp—picked up the stern and sent the propeller racing into space.

A ship's propeller is to a ship what a man's soul is to a man. Without it, she is doomed, damned, lost! Without it, she faces death. And that is what happened to the Hanyangfu, out in the wild dark.

The hours which followed were nightmare hours from which there seemed no awakening.

Bobbie recalled, afterward, that he had solemnly drawn Peggy's face to his and had kissed her. He had never said the words which usually lead up to such a deed. It just happened—and seemed normal and natural and altogether glorious!

Then he went in search of two life preservers, one of which he fastened on the girl, and the other on himself. Not that he liked wearing one, but he sensed it would comfort her. Then they waited.

It was light when the Hanyangfu struck. Light enough for them to see the ghastly, gruesome wreck of what had been their home, but what was now a slowly sinking hulk. There was enough light for them to see the seething waters about them—and a low dark something, beyond, that must be land.

There was no living aboard the doomed ship. She was being pounded to pieces in a thoroughly workmanlike manner. Not a boat remained on the bent and twisted davits. Everywhere the eye looked there were broken rails and stanchions.

Bobbie turned to the girl. He took her hands in his and gazed for a sober minute deep into her brave eyes.

"I'm going to your father, now," he said simply, "and tell him I can carry a line ashore. It looks as if we had struck right in the mouth of a lagoon. It won't be a hard swim—and the only way to get every one off is by means of the breeches-buoy."

The brave smile froze from Peggy's eyes and her lips went white. "Take me, too!" she begged. "I can swim—I can swim well. Oh, Bob, let me swim close beside you!"

"My dear! My dear!" There was a world of pain and another world of tenderness in the man's voice. "I can't! I must give all my attention to getting in safely, myself, so as to help you others ashore. We can't afford to lose time. Not a minute. The old ship will break up quickly with this pounding she's getting."

The girl clung to him for a moment. Then she stood back from him. "You are right," she said brokenly. "I should be in the way. I shall wait—and come to you —after."

In a short time, Bobbie stood, in his swimming suit—something he never traveled without—at the lee rail of the Hanyangfu. Peggy, Captain Astruthers and the entire crew stood, crouched in the shelter of the house, to watch Bobbie. Jack Finney was there, a malicious smile on his lips and a strong odor of whisky on his breath.

"He'll never make it!" he whispered, gloatingly to himself. "He'll never make it in the world!"

"Over and straight ahead!" Bobbie said briefly. "It isn't far and the ship makes a fair lee to get away in. I'm used to these waters"—he turned to the captain—"I was born and brought up beside them," he explained shortly. He paused just a fraction of a minute. "Peggy—"

"Peggy will be the first in, as soon as the breeches-buoy is ready," the old man interrupted, a mixture of despair and resignation in his brusk tone. He had seen how the land lay with his daughter and the supercargo. He, himself, preferred the mate. But if Peggy wanted Purdette—well, he'd help them along financially until the man could get a shore job, and then it was up to Peggy to work out her own salvation. Just now—

Peggy, who had discarded her life preserver because it was cumbersome, was stepping forward. She placed her arms about Bobbie's neck. For a brief instant, he held her. Then he kissed her lips, un-

clasped her arms, climbed to the rail and dived into the turbulent waters of the lagoon, followed by a low curse from the mate.

There seemed to be a thousand different eddies and currents about the hull of the Hanyangfu. Bobbie battled with these and with the spume which drove over the pounding steamer and into his stinging face.

It was not a long swim ashore, but it was a terrible one. It was the sort of swim that tears a man's muscles and almost bursts his heart. Before a final sea literally cast Bobbie up on the beach, he felt as if he had been beaten to within an inch of death. He crawled on his hands and knees up out of the water.

For an instant, he was unable to stand. Then he tottered to his feet and looked back the way he had come. He was surprised to see how close in the ship was. He raised his weary arms and waved them, triumphantly. Then he unfastened the line that had been tied around his waist.

As he did so, he saw a figure leap over the ship's rail. One of the crew who could swim and who was eager to get ashore and lend him a hand, he thought to himself. He was making good progress, whoever he was.

Bobbie made his way over the sand to the fringe of palms. Here he made a turn around the trunk of one of the trees with the line. He accomplished this just in time, for the man coming in was spent and only by holding to the line, which lay athwart the lagoon like a life-line, was he able to continue his way ashore.

Suddenly, when almost in and just as Bobbie recognized him as the burly mate, Finney's hands slipped from the line and he disappeared beneath the waters. He rose to the surface, struggling weakly. Then he went down again.

Bobbie groaned aloud. He was "all in," himself. But gritting his teeth together, he hastened to the water's edge and dived in. He struck out for the struggling man, feeling as if every stroke must be his last, but he kept on until he reached the mate.

He grasped him, expertly and started slowly back to shore. Part of the way, he swam laboredly; part of the way, he used the line. Inch by inch, he made his way to safety with his burden, dragging him at last upon the sands.

Finney was conscious. He lay, choking and coughing, for a moment. Then he looked up at the dripping, swaying figure by him. He struggled weakly to his knees and then to his feet. His eyes met those of Bobbie Purdette—and Bobbie grinned at him — a weak, cheerful grin. With a strangled sound like a sob, the mate drew a knife from his belt. This he tossed out into the water, with a single, broken cry of "Hell!"

Bobbie smiled at him. "Peace treaty signed?" he gasped, through his panting breaths. "Well then, let's get busy!"

"I came in to do you!" Finney groaned.

"Forget it! That was just booze planning—not you. Carry on, Jack!" cried Bobbie pleasantly.

The big mate paused another moment. Then: "Damn it!" he roared. "You're the biggest man I ever knew! Let's go!"

Aching muscles and thumping hearts were forgotten while the breeches-buoy was rigged. So, too, the enmity between the two men. Their knees felt as if they were breaking and their hands were numb when the buoy was finally rigged and they gave the signal to "Go ahead" to those on the ship.

Peggy was first ashore. Bobbie did not kiss her—did not take time for anything but a look into her eyes, as he started the buoy back on its errand of human salvage. Yet Peggy's heart sang, for that look had said everything she had wished to know.

When the last man was ashore—it was the captain, of course, and he brought the ship's cat and papers with him—the men gave a husky cheer for the mate and Bobbie.

But Bobbie, dazed with fatigue and aching from overstrained muscles, was swaying on his feet and gazing, wide-eyed, inland.

"What is it, dear?" a low voice asked at his side. "What do you see in that high grass?"

"High grass?" Bobbie's voice had a queer break in it. "Grass? My beloved, that's cane—sugar cane! I'll be damned—I beg your pardon—if I haven't been shipwrecked in the middle of one of father's plantations!"

He staggered across the sand, clawed up a little embankment, and fell to his weak knees on the outer fringe of cane.

"What are you doing?" Peggy, who had followed him closely, was afraid he was losing his mind, for he had thrown back his head and was laughing with all the strength he had left. "What is it? What are you doing?"

"Shaking hands with a leaf-hopper!" Bobbie gasped. "The darling! Peggy, I never knew I'd be so amazingly glad to get home!"

"Home?"

Bobbie smiled dizzily into her eyes. "Listen to me," he said softly. "Does the idea of a little bungalow right near lots and lots of sugar cane appeal to you? A bungalow with me in it, I mean?"

"A bungalow with you in it—anywhere—oh, my dear, yes!" Peggy whispered, and there was heaven in her eyes.

Bobbie gulped. "The next generation can go to Kamchatka!" he said laconically. "Dad," he spoke in the general direction of the cane-field, "I'm home to stay."

Then he added with a gentle, contented sigh:

"Damn Petropavlosk! I know the Port of Happiness when I make it!"

DESTINY

BY HENRY B. CULVER

LACHESIS spins;
And from her fatal distaff flows
A pitchy thread—the warp of woes
That are to be, the woof of sin
Predestined to enmesh the soul
Of man. Full thrice accursed those
Whose luckless lives to-day begin.
The strand is strong, the web is wide;
Ensnared by crime or lust or pride,
It drags its victims to the hole
Where shame-crowned Death forever grins.
The mist-veiled moon shows pale and hoar,
The restless river frets its shore;
A plunge, a shriek, one less, one more—
Lachesis spins.

Lachesis spins;
And now a slender thread of gold
The distaff yields. 'Tis wealth untold
To those who, all unwitting, wear
The web of gossamer the Fate
Now spins. For health and love enfold
Them, like rich garments, fine and fair;
And wisdom, honor, wit, or power
Entwines them from their natal hour
With potent meshes intricate.
One born to-day forever wins,
The moonbeams flit across the floor,
The loved ones weep when all is o'er;
A nation mourns, one less, one more—
Lachesis spins.

The Unlatched Door

by Lee Thayer

Author of "The Mystery of the Thirteenth Floor," etc.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TWO TELEGRAMS.

THE days and nights which had seemed so long to Peter Clancy had, for Richard Schuyler, passed almost in one breath. He had resolutely put behind him every unpleasant thought, and the long, warm spring days and still, jeweled nights had flown on wings.

He was exultant over the spontaneous friendship which was growing up between his cousin and Eleanor Wentworth, the seeds of which were sown during the first call that Anne Wallace made with him at his earnest solicitation. The two women had much in common and in the simple, unconventional way of the open country, they saw each other almost every day.

Eleanor Wentworth's naturally happy disposition had responded buoyantly to so much pleasant friendliness, and she had shaken, to a large extent, the sadness of her first days in Altonville. Her laugh rang again, true and clear, and her voice, with its fascinating little break, had regained its lilt.

Nora had not again referred to the circumstance which had brought Dick from New York, and he was content to await her pleasure, though his curiosity burned as brightly as ever. The more he saw of her, the surer he was that the explanation, when it came, would be complete, and he had made a compact with himself that it should be spontaneous. No word of his should sully the brightness of their days together or turn her thoughts back to circumstances which it were better, in her obviously nervous state, that she should forget.

Dick Schuyler had recognized for some time that he was irretrievably in love, but if Anna Wallace knew it also, she was too wise a woman to give any sign. She had chaperoned unobtrusively whenever it seemed necessary and, for the rest, she had left things in Dick's honest, capable hands.

"Dick ought to marry, anyway," she thought. "It would be the best thing in the world for him—and the girl is beyond price."

So the days sped by without a cloud, and Dick kept himself well in hand, for, though he was as sure of his own feelings as he would have been had he known Eleanor from the beginning of the world, there was a quiet dignity about her and a reserve which restrained him from too ardent an appearance of pursuit.

"After all," he said to himself humbly, "I may not be at all the sort of chap she could care for. I'm an idle beast, and I know she hates that. I swear I'll find something decent to do whatever happens. What was it she said the other day—something about eating your share of the world's food without making any return for it. Doesn't seem a sporting thing to do.

"She laughed when she said it—and it

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was about some one else, but it hit me right where I live. There must be a useful job somewhere, even for an ass like me. If she'd help me find it—"

He was driving his swift little car along the now familiar road from Caxton to Altonville. Eleanor had seemed a little distrait the day before, and, as he sped along the village street and stopped at Mrs. Adams's door, he was wondering if anything had occurred to trouble her.

"She just went over to the post-office, I think, Mr. Schuyler," said that large lady in answer to Dick's query. "I thought that was where she was going, but I'm not quite sure. Anyhow, she'll be back in a little while. You'd better come in and wait."

"Thank you, Mrs. Adams. I think I'll just run around by the post-office and pick her up if she's there," said Dick, turning away.

But the friendly old soul laid a restraining hand on his arm. "Won't you come in, Mr. Schuyler?" she asked hesitatingly. "I'd really like to speak to you for a moment, if you've the time."

"Why, certainly," said Dick, surprised. "What's the trouble?"

He followed her into the little parlor where she sank heavily down on a spindly chair which creaked under her weight.

"I don't suppose it's any of my business," the kind old face was both troubled and uncertain; "and maybe she wouldn't like my speaking of it to you—in fact, I'm sure she wouldn't—"

"Then you mustn't, Mrs. Adams," said Dick gravely. "Her wishes are law to me."

"I know it," said Ettie Adams. "I seen how things were with you almost from the start. You'll forgive me for sayin' so, won't you? I'm an old woman, but I don't keep my eyes shut like some folks, and I sees more than most, I sometimes thinks.

"Maybe on account of John and me. We cared a lot about each other—and it isn't over 'cause he's dead, you know. It makes me want to kinda help young people, and I know you could straighten things out for Miss Wentworth if she'd only tell you that what's troublin' her now is that she needs some money."

"What!" exclaimed Dick, thoroughly shocked and surprised. Never in all his life had he felt that need.

"She's been expecting a check for the last week and it hasn't come. She told me about it last night. I don't just understand it, but she got a letter day before yesterday, and she came dancin' in to me lookin' happy as a bird, and she says, 'Good news, at last, Mrs. Adams. This will make everything all right,' she says, wavin' the letter in the air. 'I know you'll be glad for me even though it means I'll have to leave you,' she says.

"And I was glad of anything good comin' to her, bless her pretty heart, though I will miss her terrible. And then yesterday I seen she looked awful disappointed when she come back from the post-office, and I asked her what was the trouble. She just broke down and cried. Seems she was to get some money that was due now, left her by an aunt, I think it was, and it ought to have been here at least a couple of days ago.

"She said that if it didn't come by today it 'd be too late, 'cause everything depended on her getting back to New York by to-morrow at the latest. I offered to let her have all I've got, but she wouldn't take it. Said she'd die first. That I didn't know anything about her—well, to be sure I don't except her pretty face and winnin' ways, but I'd risk every cent I have in the world on her just the same."

"You're a brick, Mrs. Adams, that's what you are!" exclaimed Dick, interrupting the breathless monologue. "If getting to New York is all that bothers her, I'm glad you told me. I can fix that up, I'm sure. I can take her up in my car. It isn't such a very long run— Was that your phone?" he broke off as an insistent peal sounded from the back of the house.

"Four rings. Yes, that's for me. You won't go, will you, Mr. Schuyler? I'll be back in a minute."

In less time than that she called him from the hall.

"It's for you, Mr. Schuyler. Your cousin wants to speak to you."

"All right," said Dick, following her through the sunny dining-room and into the kitchen. "Thank you so much. Hello, Anne. Yes, this is Dick. What is it?"

"A telegram for you," the voice came back over the wire. "Shall I read it to you, old dear?"

"Yes, please."

There was an instant's pause.

"It's from New York," Anne's voice sounded in his ear. "'Can you come at once clear up some matter in re. R. case—very important—great favor to me,' and it's signed 'P. Clancy.'"

She listened but no answer came back.

"All right, Dicky?"

"Yes, yes. Quite all right, Anne. Means I'll have to go back to town right away, though. And you were giving me such a bully time!"

"It's too bad, Dicky; but you'll come back soon, won't you? Is Miss Wentworth there? I'd like to speak to her."

"No, she's out, but Mrs. Adams says that she'll be back soon. Shall I tell her to call you?"

"No, never mind, old dear. I'll call her again later. Are you coming right over?"

"In a few minutes, Anne. I may bring Miss Wentworth over to lunch. Will it be all right?"

"Of course, Dicky. Au revoir."

"Au revoir, Anne."

"There, you see!" cried Dick, turning from the instrument to Mrs. Adams, who was hovering in the background, "I have to go back to New York myself this afternoon, and I'll make her come with me if I have to kidnap her."

Dick was anxious and excited. What new developments had there been in that awful tragedy? And had this telegram from Clancy any relation to Nora's sudden desire to get back to New York? It didn't seem probable.

She had, apparently, been overjoyed at her news. No, he decided, there could be no connection. And then the thought of the long, beautiful ride with the girl of his heart overlaid all other considerations.

He jumped into his car and raced around to the post-office just in time to see Eleanor coming out with empty hands and a look of intense disappointment on her face. It cleared a little when she saw Dick.

"Come and jump in," he cried, waving his cap with one hand and opening the little door beside him with the other.

"Now," he went on, as the girl seated herself, "I've some hustling to do if I'm to get to New York before dark."

"I—I didn't know you were going back to-day," she said slowly.

"Neither did I till about a minute ago. Just had a telegram. It's going to be a long, lonely ride, too. Wish I could induce Anne Wallace to come back with me, but it's no use. She's so in love with her old farm you couldn't pry her loose with a crow-bar."

The girl at his side sat silent.

"Say, Miss Wentworth," Dick continued as if struck by a sudden thought, "how much longer are you going to stay here? Didn't Mrs. Adams tell me yesterday that you thought you would have to leave her very soon?"

Eleanor hesitated an instant. "Yes, I did think of going to-day," she said, "but I rather think, now, that I'd better put it off."

"Oh, Miss Wentworth," he exclaimed, "wouldn't it be jolly if you were to drive back with me! It's a beautiful road. I could show you one view that would be worth the price of admission all by itself.

"It would be a real charity, honestly it would. You can't imagine how I've wished for some one to enjoy it with me every time I've driven out to Caxton. It isn't over a hundred miles. If we started by two or three, even, we could easily make it before dark. Oh, be a sport. Say you'll come!"

"It would be heavenly, I know. But—"

"But me no 'buts,'" Dick laughed. "I'm 'sot' on it, as they say here. You can pack up in a hurry, can't you?"

"Oh, yes, that won't take long." She was still hesitating, but Dick's offer seemed to her an answer to prayer.

"It's settled! It's settled, and we won't talk about it any more," Dick cried, as exultant as a small boy who has gained his point.

They had reached the little white house

with the wisteria vine which was just bursting into bloom.

"Run in and get ready," he said, opening the door for her. "We'll stop at Anne's for lunch so you can say good-by to her."

"But I haven't said I'd go," laughed Eleanor. All the look of trouble had now left her face.

"You don't need to say it, just do it," grinned Dick delightedly. "I'll have faith and you must have the works." Then suddenly sobering: "I won't insist if you really don't care to come, you know."

"Yes, yes. I do want to come. It will be wonderful. And I'm grateful to you, Mr. Schuyler. You're very kind to me! My favorite line!" She smiled happily back at him and ran up the stairs.

A little later Dick came out carrying a large suit-case which he strapped on the running-board of the car. Almost immediately Nora ran down the steps, dressed in the plain blue suit in which he had first seen her. Her small hat was drawn down tightly over the dark beauty of her hair, and her face was as happy and expectant as a child's. She had never seemed to Dick more adorable.

They waved a gay good-by to Mrs. Adams who stood at the door to see them off. When they had disappeared down Caxton Street, the kind old woman went back to her work with a sigh and a smile.

As the door closed on her ample figure, the lace curtains in the window of the front bedroom of the house opposite, which had been stirring strangely for the last few minutes, dropped into their accustomed folds, and the man who was looking for a creamery site ran out of the front door.

He gave one anxious glance down Caxton Street and then proceeded with surprising rapidity to the only garage the village contained. One look at the superannuated touring-car and the comparatively new but much used flivver which were the only cars for hire, was enough for him.

After that he stood in the garage door for a moment wiping his heated forehead. Then he went over to the telegraph-office and sent what the telegraph girl thought an unnecessarily long and most uninteresting wire about two chickens which had flown the coop. It was addressed to some one named O'Malley, who lived in New York, and consequently could, she thought, have little interest in fowls.

CHAPTER XXX.

A DETOUR AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

"THERE," cried Dick Schuyler, bringing the car to a standstill, "isn't that worth coming a bit out of the way for?"

"Oh," breathed Nora, "it's wonderful, wonderful!"

She looked down across the steep hillside, where the russet pink of budding oaks melted into the delicate green of beech and maple. Below the wood, the wide valleys, dotted with tiny farmhouses, sparsely set, swept far away in soft undulation to a rim of purple hills.

They had climbed by almost imperceptible grades through a thick woodland, and coming suddenly to the crest of the hill, the wide world lay spread before them; not with the distant and uninteresting effect of a map, but with the intimate charm of kindly companionship.

Dick loved this view, but he had seen it before. All his attention was centered in the rapt glory of Nora's face.

"The peace of God," she whispered, her hands against her breast.

So they sat for a long time silent, drinking in the beauty of the scene. At last she stirred and looked up into his face. Dick saw that her eyes were wet with tears.

"I wonder if you can understand what so much loveliness means to me," she said. Her voice was low and sweet, like the song of the thrush.

"I think I can," Dick answered, smiling down into her eyes; "perhaps more than you imagine. I remember, years ago, when I was out in the Yellowstone, a hard-headed Chicago lawyer who was with the party came back from his first view of the cañon with tears streaming down his face. What he said was, 'I didn't think any damned scenery could make me cry!' And I know just how he felt."

"So do I!" Nora exclaimed, laughing,

and the moment of emotional tension vanished as swiftly as it had come.

All the way they had been joking and teasing each other with the ease and confidence of old, old friends. The exhilarating sweep of the clean air had blown all their cares to the winds. They looked neither backward nor forward, but enjoyed to the uttermost the fleeting hours of close and irresponsible companionship.

They had been late in starting, owing to Anne Wallace's delightful hospitality, and a punctured tire had further delayed them; but Dick had insisted on this short detour, feeling that he could easily make up the time when they were back on the main road, although it was now nearing sunset.

"You don't mind if we get in by eight or half past, do you?" he had asked. "I know a bully little inn we'll reach about seven, and you can phone your friends from there when to expect you."

"I'm only going to a boarding-house where I've stayed before," Nora replied, "and there's always plenty of room there in the summer. But it would be just as well to phone, I suppose."

She was having such a heavenly, carefree time that she hated to think how soon it would be over, and was quite willing to put off its expiration for an hour or two. Half-past eight, or nine, even, was early in these long, spring evenings.

So she had gladly acquiesced in the proposed detour, and felt now that she would like to stay for hours, gazing at the enchanting prospect. But, at last, Dick thought that they must be getting on, and glancing at the declining sun, she agreed with him.

Dick turned the car back into the rough road and guided it carefully down the long descent. The tall trees closed around them, shutting them together away from the world. Silence fell between them, the silence of a friendship which had suddenly become too close for the necessity of words.

The engine purred contentedly, the evening wind whispered softly in the treetops. A brood of quail pattered down the road ahead of them, and then, with a great whir of wings, disappeared into the thick undergrowth of budding laurel and blossoming wild azalea.

"That's it. I know now!" Dick exclaimed, breaking the long silence. "That's what it is," and he pointed to a great mass of fragrant bloom beside the road.

"'What is it, that it is, that is that,' as the French say?" questioned Nora, her eyes crinkling at the corners.

"You've always made me think of the mountain laurel," said Dick quietly, his eyes on the steep curve of the road, "only it has no fragrance. The wild azalea is better. Hardy, though it looks fragile, and beautiful—and so sweet."

His voice was low, and he did not look at the girl beside him. She sat very still, her ungloved hands clasped tightly in her lap—and slowly the color mounted in her face.

They wound down a steep ravine and crossed a narrow bridge over a brook that whispered to itself and laughed as it ran as if it knew some happy secret. After they had climbed the hill beyond, the character of the roadbed improved.

"It's good from here on to the main road, and I can let her out a bit," said Dick, in a matter-of-fact tone, suiting the action to the word.

The little car leaped forward as if to prove its mettle, and the trees swung by them in a mist of mauve and green.

"Mr. Schuyler," said Nora, "I've been thinking that I'd like to tell you now what I've wanted to tell you ever since the first day when you came to Altonville."

Dick started in surprise and looked down at her. Her eyes were fixed on the road far ahead. Her head was thrust a little forward, and the wind made by their swift passage had twisted loose a lock of hair and was smoothing it back over her ear with loving fingers.

"But why now?" asked Dick gently. "It was to be on your account, you remember, not—"

There was the sharp crack of a bursting tire. The car, going at full speed, skidded violently, struck a heap of sand at the side of the road, lurched and was thrown heavily over on its side.

Dick felt himself hurtling through the

air. Black darkness fell—and nowhere in all the world of consciousness was there such a person as Richard VanLoo Schuyler.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN UNACKNOWLEDGED WITNESS.

HE came, after a time, out of the darkness of unconsciousness into the lighter darkness of the falling night. When he opened his eyes, he looked straight up into the deep blue of the twilight heavens. He could not think just where he was, but he felt very tranquil and happy, except that there was a sharp, burning sensation somewhere, far away in the distance.

It seemed to have scarcely any connection with himself, but it troubled him because it apparently was coming nearer. Then it touched the back of his head and he caught his breath in pain.

Instantly the skies were obscured. Something soft and infinitely comforting which had been lying on his forehead, moved slightly, and a voice far, far away said: "Thank God!"

Dick lay still for another moment upon the soft, mossy bank where he had fallen. The tide of memory slowly flooded back to his numbed brain. Then as the past events began to come clear, he spoke.

"Nora," he said softly, and again, "Nora," and tried to sit up.

"Lie still for a moment. Don't try to move yet."

The voice was near and sweeter to him than anything else in the wide, beautiful world. There was a little catch in it as it went on:

"I was afraid, at first, that you were dead, only your heart was still beating and I hoped—"

The thought of what she had been through cleared the last mists from Dick's brain and he sat up quickly.

"I'm all right now," he said confidently. "Don't worry about me another instant!" Their faces were close together and his eyes looked deep into hers. "And you, are you *safe?* I could never forgive myself if—"

"There isn't a thing the matter with me. Just a few bruises that don't matter at all—and my ankle caught somehow, but it isn't broken—I'm sure of that."

"Oh," cried Dick in deep distress, "I believe that you are hurt!"

"No, no. Really, I'm not. I fell in a lot of sand, luckily for me. I can stand on my feet. See."

Dick had risen to his feet also and was looking searchingly into her face. He could just distinguish, in the dim light, the brave little smile which strove to be reassuring.

"Tell me honestly," he said, gently but firmly, "do you think you can walk? We're a long way from a lemon here and—"

"Don't you think a car might come along pretty soon and pick us up?" she interrupted.

Dick bit his lips. "You are hurt, you poor, brave little girl," he said tenderly. "Sit down and let me look at that ankle."

He knelt before her and pulling off her pump, examined her slender ankle which was already slightly swollen. It made him dizzy to lean forward, but he gave no sign. Suddenly, Nora cried out sharply and touched the back of his head.

"It's bleeding," she said. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Didn't know it myself," said Dick confusedly, putting up his hand. "By Jove! so it is. Nasty mess, but doesn't amount to anything."

"Let me have your handkerchief," she said firmly, "and put your head down where I can reach it. Don't worry about me," at his murmured protest, "my foot doesn't hurt a bit unless I stand on it. Now, lower. I can't see very well in this light. Lie down and put your head in my lap. There."

She pressed the folded handkerchief with a delicate, sure touch against the cut in the back of his head, and held it there. Dick sighed in infinite content and, reaching up, laid his hand gently over hers.

"I love you," he said softly. "I love you. I love you."

The girl did not stir. She seemed scarcely to breathe.

"I've been trying not to say it for a week—or a century—I don't know—I was

afraid it was too soon—" he went on dreamily, " but it's no use. The birds sing it and the winds whisper it. Even the stars know all about it. Did you know it, little girl?"

" Hush," she said softly.

" You're sweet and mysterious like the moon—and gay and steadfast like the sun. You're all the good things in life to me," he whispered.

Silence fell between them. The leaves rustled gently overhead. A bird called thrillingly to his mate. Faint points of light pricked through the deepening color of the sky.

The cosmic unity of all life thrilled through the two tiny human atoms resting so quietly upon the breast of the world as it swung its appointed way through the great blue fields of space.

" You were mine from the beginning of time," Dick said at last. " You know it, don't you, sweetheart? My dear, my dear—"

His hand closed more tightly over hers.

" Don't," she said pleadingly. " Not yet. There is so much to explain to you."

" Not anything that matters," he cried passionately, rising to his knees, unmindful of his hurt. " What do you and I care for little mysteries? Look at me!"

He put both hands on her shoulders and gazed down into her eyes. Time ceased for them both in that look.

" You do love me in spite of everything?" she breathed at last.

" Yes. My God, how I love you!" he answered fiercely, tightening his hold on her shoulders.

She did not wince, but straightly her eyes met his.

" And I love you," she said solemnly.

A quiver shook his whole frame. He closed his eyes and drew in a long breath.

Then, slowly, he bent his head and touched her lips softly. And their two souls flowed together as when two rivers meet and mingle and become one great flood, sweeping onward to the sea.

When, at length, they again became conscious of their surroundings, night had fallen and a cool wind was whispering through the trees.

With a great wrench Dick brought his mind back to a practical consideration of their plight. The blood had ceased to flow from the cut on his head—which proved to be slight—and he felt himself again; more than himself, indeed.

He felt like a god, strong, tireless, invincible. He stood up and stretched out his arms as if to embrace the world.

" There's no chance of a car on this bad road in the dark, I'm afraid," he said, smiling down at Nora, " but I can carry you to the Back of Beyond if need be. Come," and he stretched out his hands to her.

She took them and rose to her feet with a gay little laugh.

" How far is it to the nearest house, oh, Hercules?" she said.

" Not more than a couple of miles, I think," he answered carelessly.

" And you think you could carry me all that way! Indeed, you don't know how heavy I'd be."

" I could carry you in my arms all the rest of my life and you'd never be a burden."

He stooped and lifted her from the ground.

" No, no," she said. " Let me try to walk. I promise you, if it hurts too much, I'll tell you. Put me down. Please."

His eyes laughed into hers. " You'll tell me. Honest Injun?"

" Honest Injun." She repeated the childish formula.

" Then I think we'd better get on," Dick said. He kissed her once more and placed her gently on her feet.

" I think we would, indeed," she said, smiling, " but what about your darling little car? Are you going to leave it just as it is?"

" There's nothing to be done with it now," answered Dick, looking down at it as it lay grotesquely on its side. " As soon as we can get to a telephone I'll have my chauffeur drive out in the other car and see what can be done with this one.

" He's a man of parts, William is. You'll like him. He'll attend to everything. He ought to be able to get out here by daylight. We'll have to spend the night at some farmhouse and you'll need some things—"

"If you can find that little bag of mine among the débris, I'll have everything I want," Nora interrupted. "Oh, there it is, just off to the right in front of the car."

Dick recovered the bag, which was a very light one. Then with his arm about Nora and her hand on his shoulder, they turned their backs on the wrecked car and went slowly down the quiet road. The moon had risen clear and full and, except where the trees threw black shadows across the way, was plainly discernible.

They proceeded carefully, stopping every little while to rest. Sometimes, when the road was rough, he carried her like a child, cradled in his arms. And as they went they talked, opening their hearts to each other.

The tragedy which had brought them together was uppermost in their thoughts. Nora wanted to go on with the explanation she was about to make when the accident had occurred, but Dick would not allow her to do so until he had told her the whole story of his midnight adventure. She breathed a little sigh of content when he had finished.

"I thought it was something like that," she said.

"What?" he asked, startled. "You thought—"

"Let me tell you something," she said quietly, "and you'll understand why I was so deeply hurt at your questioning me about the strange things which seemed to link me with that horrible crime."

She paused a moment and then went on: "On that dreadful morning following the murder, after that kind old police officer had sent me up to my room, I felt faint again, probably partly because I hadn't had any breakfast. I thought I'd better go down to the kitchen and get a cup of tea and just as I was passing along the hall on the second floor, I heard the street doors slam shut and almost immediately the lights in the lower hall flashed up.

"I stopped and looked over the banister and saw—all that passed. I knew from your movements and from the look on your face that you were trying to conceal something from the police. I was dreadfully puzzled and concerned—remembering the package I had given you.

"I waited and watched there in the dark. I couldn't help it. When you went into the drawing-room, I hoped you were safe, but I stayed on knowing you would come back for your hat and bag. Then I saw the young detective stoop down and look under the settle.

"My heart almost stopped because I knew that whatever you had tried to hide was there. In a minute he stood up again and held something to the light. I could see it plainly. The inside of a man's shoe."

"Good God!" exclaimed Dick. And then gently: "Sit down and rest a little while, sweetheart."

They had reached the small clearing, flooded with mellow moonlight. When they had seated themselves by the side of the road, Nora leaned against Dick's shoulder and went on:

"I remembered, then, all at once, that when I went to my window, on the previous night, to see if the rain was coming in, I saw a man standing just in front of the house. I didn't think anything of it at the time, for he moved on immediately and turned into the next house. Yours—"

She paused.

"And you trusted me!" said Dick. "You didn't think for an instant that I—"

"Of course not! I knew you better, even then. I don't care now if you know," she laughed a little happy laugh that sung its way into his heart, "that I used to watch for you to come and go. I *liked* the way you looked. There was something so—oh, I'm not going to make you conceited."

She turned her face to his and they smiled gaily into each other's eyes. "And then, that evening in the park when Vincent Quartley was trying to make me go back to Greenwich Village and take up the old life again—you were so *effective* though you didn't understand—"

"Tell me a little bit about Quartley, dear. You know I was horribly jealous of him for a while."

"Were you?" Nora laughed. "I rather hoped you would be."

"Brute!" said Dick. But he didn't look as if he really meant it.

Nora's face became grave. "Vincent

Quartley is a dear, really he is. And he cares for me, a lot—I found out that day you saw me crying by the side of the road. He had just asked me to marry him and when I told him I couldn't he took it very hard. It almost broke my heart.

"And I do love him, Dick. He's a fine man. He hasn't held it against me, either.

"He had found some work for me to do. That was why I was so anxious to get back to town. He's a good friend and I think I would have married him only—"

"Only?" said Dick with a happy, rising inflection.

"Only, even then, as they say in books, I loved another."

There was a short interruption of the conversation. Then Dick said:

"You spoke of the old life, dear. What old life?"

"Are you sure you want to know the secrets of my horrible past?"

"Of course I do, you absurd child. I'm burning with curiosity—though it won't make any difference—"

"No, it won't, my dear," she said gravely. "But I'm rested now. I'll tell you as we go."

CHAPTER XXXII.

NORA'S STORY.

"IT'S rather a long story," Nora began, "and I'm afraid I'll have to begin at the beginning to make you understand it all."

Dick listened without interruption while she told him of her childhood. Of the fascinating little mother who had been an actress in a famous company and who had died when Nora was a little girl. She told of her father, a New England college professor and that he had died soon after her mother—of a broken heart.

"I was brought up by the aunt whose portrait you saw," Nora went on. "We lived in Framingham and I went to school there. It is a very well known school and girls come there from all over the world. It was there that I first knew Inez Rutledge."

Dick looked down at her quickly, but said nothing and Nora continued:

"I knew her very well for we were both immensely interested in the pageants and amateur theatricals, which were part of the course. I had always been a good mimic and I used to imitate our old maid of all work, Rosy Brady, so that Aunt Louise couldn't tell which of us was speaking if she didn't see us.

"It annoyed poor old auntie very much and she used to scold me about it. I didn't understand it at the time, but I know now that she had a great aversion to the stage as a profession, and was afraid that I'd follow in my mother's footsteps."

They had come out of the woods at last, and the bare, sloping hillside lay before them, dreaming in the gentle light. The pale road wound down into the valley where a few tiny lights shone in a cluster of houses at the crossroads.

"Look," said Dick, pointing. "It isn't much farther now, sweetheart."

"No, it isn't much farther now," repeated Nora. "Shall I go on with my story? I'm not boring you?"

Dick laughed at the absurdity of the question.

"Well," said Nora, "Aunt Louise died two years after I graduated and left me all she had, poor dear, but on the condition that I should not go on the stage. I saw from that how keenly she felt about it. I would have respected her wishes in any case, I think.

"Fortunately—or unfortunately—I had another talent against which the New England conscience hasn't quite so much of a prejudice. I could draw pretty well and I loved it. We had an unusually good teacher in school and I had the right kind of training from the start.

"So I took what little money I had and came to New York to study. I found a cheap room in old Greenwich Village, and in the studio of a fellow student I met Vincent Quartley. She showed him the miniature I had painted of Aunt Louise and he thought it promising and offered to get me some commissions among his friends.

"That was early last winter. I thought I had enough money to go on then—not having had any experience of how much it costs to live in New York—and I told him

I'd like to wait until I had a little more training. Then, toward the middle of the winter, there was a terrible slump, I think you call it, in the stock market and the dividends I should have had on January first didn't come.

"I didn't tell any one, but wrote to my aunt's lawyers in Hartford. They wrote back that the stock was good and would be sure to pay more dividends by spring. That I had better keep it and not worry."

She laughed a little sadly. "I asked Mr. Quartley then to get me some commissions if he could, but he didn't know of my necessities and nothing came of it. Pretty soon my money was all gone and I didn't know what to do.

"I watched it dwindle and thought and thought. I was peculiarly alone in the world, without any close relatives and I couldn't borrow money when I had no certainty of being able to repay it."

"Poor little girl," said Dick pitifully.

He picked her up in his arms and carried her for a while, her cheek against his. They did not speak again until Nora insisted upon his putting her down. Then she said:

"And now we come to the adventure! One day, while riding in the street-car, I heard two handsomely dressed women talking. They were rather common and spoke so loudly that I could hear almost every word. They were remarking upon the difficulty of getting servants and one of them said: 'I pay a parlor-maid fifty dollars a month and she has a good home and no expenses and still she isn't satisfied.'

"I didn't hear any more. I knew that was one thing I could do and I made up my mind, then and there, to be such a housemaid as was never seen before on sea or land.

"It was the only decent and honest thing to do. It amused me to think how startled my prospective mistress would be at my perfections. I would make it a stage part, I said to myself, and I would play it as beautifully as it could be done."

Again she laughed, but Dick did not smile.

"You know," she went on amusedly, "you wouldn't believe how difficult it is for a girl, brought up as a 'lady,' to get a place as a servant. I didn't know how to go about it, but I tried an agency first. They asked for recommendations—and, of course, I couldn't produce any.

"Then I went through the papers and answered advertisements. It was the same story. At last I saw an advertisement for a parlor-maid and it gave the initials H. G. R. and the address of the Rutledge house.

"You know, from Miss MacLeod's story, what happened. When I saw Inez I was so startled that I couldn't speak. She took me into her room and I told her frankly all my troubles. She was kind and offered me money, but I wouldn't take it. I felt sure that I must find a place somewhere when I was willing to do any kind of work which was fairly honest."

She looked up at Dick with the crinkle of amusement in the corners of her eyes which he loved so well, but the thought of her unprotected loneliness bit so deep that he could not take the situation as cheerfully as she did.

"So she insisted on your staying there as a housemaid," he said with a touch of bitterness in his voice. He was thinking that all the time he was living in careless comfort, with only the thickness of a wall between them.

"Yes. Since I wouldn't have help in any other way, she did insist. She said she would be able to make things easier for me and safer than in any place taken haphazard.

"She meant to be kind. I'm sure she meant to be kind, poor girl, but she had changed a good deal—or I had been too young, when I first knew her to realize the possibilities of a nature like hers and at last we had a bad quarrel over her miniature."

"You painted the one you gave me to take care of," said Dick eagerly. "By Jove! A clever piece of work!"

"It was like her, wasn't it? Yes, when I told her what my ambitions were she gave me a commission to paint one of her. She said she would pay me for it, which would have been a great help, and that she would show it to her friends and get me many orders.

"I was very happy about it and I worked on it all her free mornings. We kept the

door locked for we didn't want any one to know. She said that it would ruin my career if any one knew that I had been a servant. It rather amused me for I never seemed a servant to myself—it was nothing to me but a part, to be played as artistically as I could, and I put in all the frills just for fun.

"I made it a character part with the brogue of dear old Rosy. I even took her last name but I kept my own first name because I knew Miss MacLeod had heard Inez call me 'Nora,' the name the girls had all called me by in school."

"I see," said Dick, keenly interested. "Go on, dear."

"So, you see, when the awful tragedy occurred, I was simply swept off my feet and what had been rather a lark, though a necessary one, became serious enough. If the miniatures had been found, I would have been obliged to tell everything to the police. I could see it all coming out in the papers and what chance had I, in my real profession, after that?

"Even Vincent Quartley, with all his friends, would have found it impossible to get commissions for me, and he was my best hope. It was only the day before, you remember, that I met him in the park. It was quite by accident; I wouldn't have seen him for the world, but we met face to face and I had to speak to him. He'd been so kind to me and so understanding that, when he asked me why I had disappeared from Greenwich Village and what I was doing, I told him.

"I thought he would see it as a lark and sympathize with my clever idea for tiding things over. But he didn't, not a bit. He was very stern about it. Said he'd lend me all the money I needed." Dick winced and Nora went on hurriedly:

"Of course I wouldn't take it and I told him that I couldn't leave anyway without giving notice; no decent servant would. That made him awfully mad, Dick, and he was insisting some more when you came up.

"In the face of everything it seemed suicidal to let it all come out in the papers. And the hideous notoriety of it all! It seemed as if I could not bear it!"

"And so you trusted the miniatures to me, a perfectly sensible idea," said Dick.

"Yes, and you were so sweet about it all. I'll never forget it."

"It was nothing, nothing, sweetheart. Any one who wouldn't trust a face like yours would have to be blind. But now, let's get back to the main thread of your thrilling narrative.

"You said that you and Mrs. Rutledge had a quarrel about the miniature. Why was that? Wasn't she pleased with it?"

"Oh, yes. She was quite crazy about it, but, Dick, she was going to give it to Mr. Cuthbert Pendleton."

"The deuce!"

"Yes, I gathered it from something she let drop and I made her own it. She was—well, Dick—she was pretty horrid about it. Said she had me in her power and more, rather ugly things. It didn't make any difference to me. I wouldn't let her do so compromising a thing if I could help it.

"I know Mr. Pendleton was too vain and foolish not to have shown it and boasted of it. So I took the miniature to my room and hid it in my trunk with that of Aunt Louise. When I went to get them to give to you, I wrapped them both in the paint-rag—"

"A paint-rag!" interrupted Dick. "Good Lord! Then the red smear—"

"Was paint, of course, you dear old goose!"

Dick stopped still in the middle of the road and looked at her. She was laughing and in a moment his laughter joined hers and they stood together in the moonlight with locked hands, rocking to and fro in uncontrollable, hysterical merriment.

"Fool that I am!" Dick choked out at length. "Never to have thought of it. I was so horrified that I didn't really look at it carefully. The shape of the mark and the color were so suggestive—"

"I know. I looked at it again after you'd gone, the day you brought it back to me—but it was only made by a brush full of brown matter. There was so much of it because, I remember, Inez had knocked a brush off her dressing-table onto my little palette. Wasn't it Fate that it should have

fallen into that dark-red paint and not into any other color?"

"Yes, it was Fate, for if it hadn't been so exactly the color of blood I might never have had the temerity to seek you out, but would have sent the package to you with a note of explanation—perhaps. No, I would have found some way of seeing you again! I won't think that anything in heaven or earth ever could or ever will part us."

The moon lost sight of Nora just then and there was but one long shadow on the road. The old moon was quite used to the antics of shadows and was not at all surprised when the shadows were two again, drifting down to the deeper shadows, where the trees cuddled about the little farmhouses at the crossroads.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A CROSS-EXAMINATION.

CAPTAIN O'MALLEY tilted back in his swivel-chair, glancing sidewise with frowning eyes at the man who sat beside him. The man himself was very uncomfortable. He fidgeted about in his chair and rolled his cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other.

"I don't care what you think, O'Malley," he was saying defensively, "even you couldn't have helped yourself. In that jay town there wasn't anything to be had but a flivver with one lung and an old touring-car of the vintage of 1816 that limped in the off-hind leg. Schuyler had an Eight that ran like a bird—and what was I to do?"

He threw out both hands with a gesture of appeal to all the gods to witness the hopelessness of his situation.

"I suppose the possibility of a getaway in that little eight never occurred to you in all the two weeks or more that you knew it was there," growled O'Malley.

"You sent me out to watch the girl, didn't you?" The man rose and, kicking his chair out of the way, stamped impatiently up and down the office. "*She* didn't have anything to get away in—"

"Oh, cut it, Brown. You saw 'em together all the while. Where's your imagination? You'd put two and two together and get one every time. You ought to have been prepared for just what happened.

"There must have been some way to get a good car. But you went to sleep at the switch as you've done twice before lately. I can't have that sort of thing, you know."

"I'm sorry as the devil, captain, honest I am." Brown was almost weeping. "Maybe you could have hired or bought a car in time, but I didn't like to run up my expense account on the chance and—"

"Well, we won't say any more about it, Brown. But, mind you, pull off the next job I give you or it 'll be the last, you can take it from me. Now run away and play. I'm busy."

The sternness faded from O'Malley's face as the crestfallen man made his way to the door. "And, oh, Brown! Your losing your birds this time didn't matter so much. Schuyler phoned Clancy late last night.

"He'd had a breakdown, somewhere on the road, but he's in town by this time and he'll report to me this evening. He feels perfectly safe and isn't trying to get away, so that part's O. K."

"And that girl?" asked Brown eagerly, his whole figure relaxing from the strain of his superior's unwonted severity.

"She was still with him when he phoned," answered O'Malley shortly. "We'll take care of them both from now on. Beat it now and remember it wasn't your fault that the beans weren't spilled."

O'Malley, looking with a sardonic smile after Brown's dejected figure, heard a loud exclamation and saw Brown jump back across the threshold.

"Look out there! Where the hell do you think you're going!"

It was Peter Clancy's voice raised to the highest pitch of tense excitement and it was Peter's agitated face which appeared immediately at the door. He was carrying a good-sized package with exceeding care.

"O'Malley," he cried, ignoring Brown altogether, "O'Malley! I've got it! My God, I've got it at last!"

O'Malley had risen ponderously from his seat. "Needn't stay any longer on our ac-

count, Brown," he said with a hurried wave of his hand. Then, as Brown vanished, he hastily crossed the room, closed and locked the door and turned back to Peter.

"Were you right, my lad?" he asked almost in a whisper.

Peter had dropped into a chair, still hugging the parcel in his arms. He stared at O'Malley with fixed, expressionless eyes and slowly nodded his head.

"It's here," he said in an awestruck voice. Then suddenly his self-control broke. The boy, for he was only a boy, leaned forward and buried his face on his arm.

"Why, Peter, Pete, my lad," cried O'Malley, laying his friendly hand on Clancy's shoulder. "Buck up, old chap. What the devil is the matter?"

Peter raised to his old friend a face in which many emotions contended for mastery.

"It's so damned pitiful," he said, brokenly. "But, O'Malley!" The sadness vanished from his face and he brought his clenched hand down on the desk. "I was right! Good God! Do you realize it? We were right. The case is finished!"

That evening O'Malley sat quietly in his room. The green-shaded electric light hanging above the table threw grotesque shadows upon the walls and floor. It shone brightly on O'Malley's enigmatic face and watchful eyes.

Presently Peter Clancy opened the door softly. "All right, captain?" he whispered.

The old man nodded his head slightly with a sidelong glance toward a pair of curtains which obscured the door at the end of the room.

"In there?" asked Peter as quietly as before.

"Yes," said O'Malley, stretching out his broad hand in which lay a key. "You can go in through the hall. Everything is all ready."

"I understand," and Peter disappeared as quietly as he had come.

A few moments later, a loud knock startled the silence.

"Come in," said O'Malley. His face betrayed no excitement of any kind.

Again Clancy opened the door. "Mr. Schuyler is here, Captain O'Malley," he said in his ordinary manner. "May he come in and—"

"Certainly. How do you do, Mr. Schuyler?"

"How are you, captain? Sorry to have been delayed. I've brought Miss Wentworth with me, you see. She insisted on coming—"

Except for a slight paleness and a small plaster on the back of his head, Dick appeared none the worse for the accident of the preceding evening. Nora's face, also, had lost some of its color and she limped a little as she entered, leaning on Dick's arm.

"Miss Wentworth!" O'Malley rose from his seat. "Ah, I understand. He's found you out, too, has he?"

The captain's face was grave. He motioned them both to be seated and resumed his chair. Peter remained in the shadows near the door.

"I asked Clancy to bring you here, Mr. Schuyler," O'Malley began, leaning both elbows on the table in front of him and looking hard at Dick, "for several important reasons. First of all," he wagged a threatening forefinger, "I want to know what you were doing in the hall of the Rutledge house on the night and at about the time that Mrs. Rutledge was murdered."

Nora drew in her breath sharply and glanced anxiously at Dick. His face was imperturbable and he answered quietly: "I don't know why you think—"

"I don't think. I know," O'Malley rapped out angrily. We've got the goods on you, all right. Look here, if you don't believe me."

With a quick motion of his hand he lifted the cover from a box which stood at his elbow and turned the contents out on the table.

"Oh, my Lord! Those infernal shoes again," groaned Dick. "Isn't it the limit?"

"You admit that they're yours, then?" questioned O'Malley sharply.

"Oh, thunder, yes! They're mine all right. Where's the sense in denying it—and I wouldn't now if I could. Who found 'em? Peter?"

"Yes, Pete found 'em, and sorry the lad was to do it, Mr. Schuyler. Now what have you to say for yourself? You're taking a serious thing rather lightly, let me warn you."

"Oh, I'm not taking it lightly, captain, believe me," said Dick. "If you knew the amount of worry those miserable pumps have caused me, you'd be sorry for me. I'll tell you the whole story and I'll be glad to get it off my chest."

Peter leaned forward with anxious interest and O'Malley's eyes never left Dick's face while he told the tale of his misadventures. The captain subjected him to a rigid cross-examination, but Dick remained calm. His glance met O'Malley's, clear and firm, and he answered all questions with manly directions—but the old man seemed unconvinced.

"That's all very well, Mr. Schuyler," he said when Dick had finished, "but if you're as innocent as all this amounts to, why not have told us at once?"

"He was shielding me," cried Nora, breathlessly.

"What!" O'Malley wheeled sidewise in his chair and regarded the girl sternly. "So you're mixed up in it, too?"

"Oh, Captain O'Malley, Mr. Schuyler is perfectly innocent and so am I, but I did a very foolish thing on that dreadful morning. I had something of my very own that I didn't want any one to see, so I gave it to Mr. Schuyler to take care of for me—"

"And as I had it in my pocket when you came," Dick interrupted, "it cramped my style a little, don't you see."

"H-m!" said O'Malley noncommittally, fixing Nora with his light-blue eye. "What was it that you gave him?"

"I'm not really a servant," the girl began, deprecatingly. "I'm—"

"Miniature painter, by profession," rejoined O'Malley crisply. "Yes, we know all about that and about how you came to know Mrs. Rutledge. We are able to find out a few things by ourselves. I suppose you were about to tell me that the thing you gave Mr. Schuyler had something to do with your life before you saw fit to begin masquerading."

"It was a package containing two of Miss Wentworth's miniatures," said Dick abruptly, not liking O'Malley's tone. "We had made up our minds to tell you the whole story when we came here to-night. That was why Miss Wentworth insisted on coming with me. We both acted on impulse—and foolishly—I admit it. But—"

"Captain O'Malley!" Peter started from the shadows and held up a warning finger.

O'Malley raised his eyebrows and then nodded, comprehendingly. His face was intent and frowning, but gave no clue to his thoughts.

There was the sound of a light footfall on the landing, followed immediately by a clear, purposeful knock on the door. Peter, who was standing close by, opened it and admitted Hammond Rutledge.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

O'MALLEY DRAWS ASIDE THE CURTAIN.

"HOW are you, Clancy? Good evening, Captain O'Malley."

Rutledge came swiftly forward with long, even strides. Peter, having acknowledged the greeting, unostentatiously disappeared.

"Very good of you to come, Mr. Rutledge," said O'Malley gravely. "You know Miss Wentworth, though her name may be unfamiliar."

Rutledge looked from the old man to the girl with a puzzled frown and bowed slightly.

"I'll tell you about that later," O'Malley went on. "D'you know Mr. Schuyler?"

"I haven't that pleasure, and I'm very glad of this opportunity of making his acquaintance," said Hammond Rutledge, holding out his hand. "I hear that I have to thank you, Mr. Schuyler—"

"Don't mention it," said Dick, waving the acknowledgement aside. "I did only what any man would have done in the circumstances." Then turning to the captain: "Is there anything more that you wish to know, Captain O'Malley?" he asked.

The old man looked steadily from one serious face to the other. Then he said slowly: "I'm going to ask you and Miss

Wentworth to remain for a little while. Please be seated, and you, too, Mr. Rutledge."

He dropped heavily into his chair. "No, Mr. Schuyler, there is nothing more which we wish to know. The case is complete."

Rutledge started forward in his chair. "You mean—" he exclaimed.

O'Malley nodded slowly, once, twice, thrice. "We have found the criminal who murdered your wife," he said.

"Pendleton!" cried Rutledge, leaping to his feet. "Where is he? Tell me!"

"Is he in there?" pointing to the closely drawn curtains at the end of the room.

He started toward them, but O'Malley intercepted him. "Hold hard, Mr. Rutledge!" he exclaimed warningly, and caught his arm. "Wait!"

But the younger man shook him off with fierce determination. "If he's in there, I'll have him if the whole police force try to stop me. I warn you, O'Malley. I've a long account to settle with him. Stand out of the way!"

The old captain did not flinch.

"You'll not pass me till I'm ready, Mr. Rutledge," he said sternly, his bristling eyebrows drawn low over his flashing eyes. "When I start a thing I put it through in my own way, and I'll ask you to postpone the consideration of personal quarrels till a more fitting time. What happened before the murder concerns only yourself. We have to do now with that crime alone."

He met Rutledge's glance fearlessly, eye to eye, and in the tone of one who brooks no denial, he continued: "Will you be good enough to take my chair and try to listen with some degree of self-control to the evidence we have found?"

O'Malley was so obviously right in the stand he took that Rutledge pulled himself together with a great effort of the will, though his hands were still clenched and his face ravaged with fierce anger. He put a stern constraint upon his emotions and went slowly to the chair behind the table. Apparently he had quite forgotten Nora and Dick, who sat still and silent just beyond the range of the light.

O'Malley waited until Rutledge was seated, then he turned, crossed the room quietly and drew back one of the curtains which concealed the entrance to the adjoining room. Rutledge leaned far forward, expecting to see Pendleton's hated face, but nothing moved in the room, which was dimly lit and apparently empty.

The old captain faced about and slowly raised his hand.

There was an instant's strained silence followed by a faint whirring sound. Then a voice spoke softly—an old voice, low and trembling.

"Hush, listen!" it said, as if the person speaking were thinking aloud. "Was that her voice? No, not yet."

A pause.

Hammond Rutledge, whose eyes had been striving to pierce the dim shadows of the back room, turned a startled glance upon O'Malley and half rose from his chair. O'Malley shook his head slightly, enjoining silence, and the old voice went on:

"So late, so late. Oh, my poor laddie, my poor bairn!" The tone changed to one of hate and scorn. "The Scarlet Woman, decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand the golden cupful of abominations—"

The voice trailed off to silence. Rutledge started to his feet.

"Anna!" he cried. "Poor old Anna! Is she there? What *is* it? How—"

"It's an invention of my own," O'Malley spoke rapidly. "Clancy got the records. She knew nothing about it. He's been getting them for the last two weeks and we've pieced them together. We've suspected for some time, but he only got the conclusive ones this morning. Listen—"

From an indistinguishable murmur, the old voice rose again:

"Watch! Watch and wait! Hush, there they are! Ah, look at her, the traitress! How long, O Lord, how long!

"Her poison is like the poison of a serpent. If the poor laddie tried to reason with her, she would not hear. She's like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ears.

"Look. What is that little paper he's giving her. And she smiles at him. Mischief! I can tell it by their faces. Ah-h-h.

"I've seen enough."

Then very slowly and solemnly—

"Send forth thy sickle and reap, O Lord, for the hour to reap is come.

"The sickle—here, in the drawer, at my hand—God has appointed me, his servant, to render unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she mingled, to mingle to her double. As the wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish!"

A heavy silence fell upon the room. Hammond Rutledge sat tensely still, his face buried in his hands. Again there was a soft whir—

"I waited up to help you, Mrs. Rutledge," the voice was slightly louder and very stern, "and I saw, through the door there"—the voice paused as if some one else had spoken; then rose again.

"Stop, oh, stop, woman, while there is yet time. Repent!"

Another silence, then, very quietly: "Shall I take your cloak, madam?"

A long, heavy sigh.

"The great wine-press of the wrath of God—and there came out blood from the wine-press. It is done. Thou has destroyed the wicked. Dead. Dead! In her full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. Sleep. Sleep!

"Roses, roses red as blood for the Scarlet Woman. Fold her hands—they shall work no more evil—"

"What's this? His card—the lover's card—and on the back—ah, a tryst. You will not meet your lover now.

"Hush. No noise. No one will know. The knife—back in its place. No, wash it first. That's right—and now, to bed. Softly, softly."

Another sigh.

"Ah, safe, safe. God will protect me. The elect cannot fail. He will uphold them with his hands."

Again silence fell upon the listeners. No one moved or spoke.

Suddenly the voice was lifted on a high note of agony and appeal—

"God, God!" it cried, and again the word. "God!" in a terrified groan.

"Save me, O God! For the waters are come into my soul. I sink in deep mire where there is no standing." Then in an awestruck whisper: "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. I took the weapon into mine own hand! Ah, wo is me! I took the vengeance upon myself!

"Forgive me, O God! Forgive"—the voice wailed. "Consider and answer me. Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of eternal death!"

"Stop her, stop her!" cried Rutledge in agony, springing forward. "I can't bear any more! She did it for me! Oh, Anna, Anna—"

O'Malley caught his arm. "She found peace at last," he said softly. "Listen—"

Faintly and tremulously the voice came again, with the trusting tone of a little child:

"Now I lay me down to sleep. If I should die—before—I—wake—"

A faint murmur—and all was still.

Rutledge looked appealingly at O'Malley, who nodded quietly.

"She died this afternoon," he said.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HOW PETER GUESSED.

STILLNESS lay upon the room like a heavy pall when Captain O'Malley ceased speaking. The little group of listeners had been deeply affected by the recent disclosures, each in his own way, and Hammond Rutledge most of all.

His head was bowed in grief, and for a long time he sat silent. At last he spoke sadly.

"Poor old Anna," he said. "Poor, demented, faithful old Anna! Who could have thought"—he paused an instant, then with a slight change of manner went on: "I went back to the house on that fatal night. I didn't tell you about it because there seemed to be no need.

"It was early, about half past ten. I was troubled about—but never mind that. Anna was the only person I saw and I realize now that she must have been in a terribly excited state of mind. I was too much worked up myself to pay much attention at the time, but on looking back I can see that she behaved strangely, that her eyes had a curious wild look.

"It made little impression on me then

and I haven't thought of it since. It is so difficult to think of one's dear old nurse in connection with a horrible crime, but an insane person is, of course, capable of anything. And she must have been insane even then, though I saw no sign of it until the last time I saw her. And I never dreamed—I don't see how the possibility could have occurred to any one."

"It never entered my head, I'll tell you frankly," said O'Malley. "It took some one with a keener insight than mine to pick up the right thread. It was Peter Clancy.

"Come here, Pete, lad. Here's the real detective for you," he went on as Peter came through the curtained doorway. "If it hadn't been for this boy, we might never have found the right track."

Dick Schuyler jumped out of his chair. "Why, Peter, old scout, if you knew all this, why'd you let the captain put the screws on me the way he did?" He was half laughing with relief.

"Sorry, Mr. Schuyler," answered Peter, apologetically. "We weren't absolutely sure, when we telegraphed you. And even after we were, O'Malley insisted on having the whole thing cleared up. He was pretty mad at the way you'd put it over on us. Weren't you, captain?"

"Yes, I was," admitted O'Malley, "and I thought this young man deserved a lesson—"

"Oh, I've learned it all right," said Dick, laughing outright this time. "I'll tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, from this time on, s'help me!"

"You and Miss Wentworth having been so mixed up in the case, we thought it would be only right to have you here at the finish," said O'Malley. "It was Pete's idea."

"There seems to be a lot of things I don't understand." Rutledge broke into the conversation. "In what way was Mr. Schuyler implicated? And what does Nora—I beg your pardon—Miss Wentworth—know?"

Nora had dried her eyes, for she had been crying softly, and now stood close beside Dick, her hand in his. With many a question and interruption, between them all they put Hammond Rutledge in possession of the facts.

"I begin to see," he said slowly, when they had finished, "but this doesn't explain Clancy's suspicions."

"You tell them about it, lad," said O'Malley.

"Well," began Peter modestly, "the first jolt I had was just at the end of Miss MacLeod's testimony, on the morning after the murder, when Miss Nora fainted. You remember, Mr. Schuyler?"

Dick nodded and Peter went on:

"I don't know whether you noticed it or not, but the old lady was pretty much upset—and no wonder—and when I took the glass of water she had brought for Miss Nora, her hand trembled so that it spilled all down her skirt. I wiped it off with my handkerchief and thought nothing about it, but when I took the handkerchief out of my pocket later on, it was all stained red.

"I couldn't think where it came from for a second and then I remembered. It seemed awfully queer, but I couldn't make it fit in; anyway, I studied it. The old lady looked and acted innocent enough and there was nothing out of the way in her room when I examined it.

"I knew she must be pretty nearly batty on religion because there were stacks of tracts and things like that in her room. There was one called "The Seventh Commandment" that was all underscored and almost worn out with reading. I couldn't see why at the time and it wasn't till much later that it put any idea into my old bean. The whole thing seemed too far-fetched.

"But then I got another jolt when Captan O'Malley handed me the sheet of paper that Pendleton's card was enclosed in. You tell 'em about that, O'Malley."

And the old man told them the whole story of his receipt of Pendleton's card and of Peter's subsequent trip to Fairfield, which resulted in the pursuit and final discovery of Pendleton.

"Pete and I both made up our minds when we examined the evidence closely, that he had nothing to do with the actual crime," concluded O'Malley, "but we weren't absolutely certain which way the cat was going to jump, the clues were so mixed up, and we have kept Pendleton under surveillance till to-day.

"I don't mind telling you, for your per-

sonal satisfaction, Mr. Rutledge, that the man's a wreck. He was so afraid of what you would do to him if you found him that he dodged around from pillar to post, and when Fox found him he was ragged and hollow-eyed from lack of sleep, and more dead than alive. He has suffered about as much as that sort of a man can and my advice to you is," his voice was very kind, "to listen to what your old friend" he motioned toward the other room, "said. 'Vengeance is mine,' and the rest of it—you know."

O'Malley paused a second, then in a different tone he said:

"I told Fox, the man who found Pendleton, to put the fear of God into him when he went up to New Hampshire today to call off his men. Wouldn't be surprised if Pendleton tried an ocean voyage for his complaint. Anyhow, I don't believe you'll ever see him again—after Fox gets through with him."

Rutledge, without speaking, gravely reached over and shook the captain's hand. The old man grinned appreciatively.

"Now, get on with your tale, Pete, my lad," he said and Peter resumed:

"It was that blank sheet of paper that made me sit up and take notice. I knew it was important, for, as O'Malley pointed out, the person who sent that card had a grudge against Pendleton and it would help a lot if we could find out who it was and what kind of a grudge it might be. And I knew I'd seen some paper like that somewhere—only I wasn't just sure where.

"Coming back on the train from Fairfield it came to me like a flash. I remembered that Miss MacLeod's waste-basket was empty the first time I went over the house, but when we combed it over again with a fine-tooth comb, after everybody had gone, I thought I recollected the basket being half full of scraps, and among them a piece of mottled paper.

"I began to piece things together as the train buzzed along and the very first chance I had, I took the handkerchief I told you about—I'd kept it carefully wrapped up—to VanDorn and Sawyer to have the stain analyzed.

"I didn't say anything to O'Malley yet and I went to interview Miss Dalton for him. While she was out of the room I found a queer-looking paper-cutter, and the shape and size of it scared me.

"I swiped it, I'm sorry to say. I hope you'll apologize to her for me, Mr. Rutledge. I sent it back by registered mail as soon as I found the right weapon."

"Go on," Rutledge said.

"Well, I went back to the house again and found the other half sheet of notepaper in Miss MacLeod's waste-basket, just as I thought. I spent the night there going over everything.

"I'd had the report from VanDorn and Sawyer and it was human blood that I'd wiped off Miss MacLeod's skirt."

Nora drew in her breath with a little gasp of horror. Peter went on:

"You remember the drop of blood on the floor of the hall, near the stair wall, Mr. Schuyler, and the smear still farther down toward the pantry door? Well, I thought at the time, that made it look like an inside job, because otherwise the murderer would have beat it out of the front door, and not have gone that way at all. You see that, don't you?"

"Yes."

"So I figured it out that, supposing the old lady had had a strong enough motive, and her affection for Mr. Rutledge and her anger against any one who was injuring him might have been strong enough for almost anything, especially if the poor old lady was off her nut. Then what could have been easier than for her to slip down the back stairs and watch through the little window in the pantry door for Mrs. Rutledge to come home?

"I was nearly sure that Pendleton was with her, and it wasn't hard to imagine what Miss MacLeod might have seen. There was a drawer just inside the pantry door, full of spoons and forks and knives. There were several carving knives and, among them, this one."

He pulled open the table drawer and showed one, long, pointed and very sharp.

"What could have been easier than to take this out—and use it—and after it had been washed, who would know that it had ever been taken from its place?"

The group around Peter followed his story in breathless suspense.

"We had it all cinched that the criminal was left-handed on account of the direction of the wound, and O'Malley was sure that it was a left-handed man who did it, because of those matches we found. They were yours, Mr. Schuyler, weren't they?

"Gee, you can imagine the jolt it gave me when I found out you bought your shoes from Hobson and I knew you were left-handed! Afterward, when I found your shoes, I had the right idea cinched, but I sure was puzzled, and then some!"

"I should think so. Too bad, Peter. I'm awfully sorry."

"Never mind, Mr. Schuyler. You should worry! Well, to get back. I had my own reasons for not being so sure that it was a man that did the trick; that smudge on the floor of the hall looked like the mark of a skirt to me, among other things. And afterward I found out that Miss MacLeod was left-handed."

"How was that?"

"Oh, simple enough. Rawlins was watching the house where she lived, on the outside, and she didn't know him from a hole in the wall, so I had him follow her whenever she went out. He saw her pay for things in a shop, over and over again, and she always took the money out and counted it with her left hand, besides using it in preference to her right for everything else, so we made sure there was no mistake.

"In the meantime, Captain O'Malley felt that we had enough to go on to make it a necessity to watch her closely, so I took over the inside half of the job. Gee, it was fierce work."

Peter took out his handkerchief and wiped his heated forehead.

"I took the room next to hers and made a hole in the wall through to the paper on the other side and listened there night after night. She talked to herself all night long, and soon I was *sure* she was crazy.

"She prayed and prayed and sometimes it was as if the God she prayed to was in the room with her. Then, about a week ago, she began to go back over things that had happened long ago, just as if they were going on then. She talked and waited for some one to answer and then went on again.

"It was spooky, I can tell you, because I knew that she was alone all the time. Then things began to come through that I was sure had a bearing on what we were trying to find out and I brought the captain's dictrola model that he'd just finished and cut a hole clean through the wall in a place I knew would be hidden by her bed. It didn't have to be very big and she never saw it."

Peter sighed wearily and spread out his hands. "And that's all, I think. We cut out of the records all the prayers and mutterings and made it as nearly a continuous thing as we could—and you know the rest."

"Fine work, Peter, fine work, old scout," cried Dick, breaking the spell of awed silence which had fallen over the little group. "You'll be the greatest detective the world has ever seen, you and the captain, too.

"It was good of you both to let us know the whole story. I'm sure Miss Wentworth would thank you, too, but it's all been a pretty rough experience for her, and I think I'd better take her home."

He glanced down at her tenderly, with a look in his eyes which never comes into the eyes of any man but for one woman. "Come, dear," he said.

She returned his look with confidence and love. Then they quietly bade the others good night and left the room together. O'Malley held the door open for them, and as they passed out the bright light in the hall fell upon their faces.

The old man closed the door softly and turned back to the room with a sigh.

"It's an ugly job we've got, Pete and I, Mr. Rutledge," he said, "and sometimes it seems like a regular nightmare! But when you see people like those two going out, hand in hand, like two little children—well, then—sometimes it seems as if the dream wore thin and that all the ugliness and fear and hate were gone—and that the only *real* thing left was what those two have—truth and love.

"Maybe—I don't know— Anyhow, it's a great game, a great game, eh, my lad?"

(The end.)

Molly's Leap-Year Leap

by James W. Egan

"WILL you have the meat or the fish?" Molly asked, as she carefully dusted a stray crumb from the cloth.

I was addressing a bowl of clam chowder with industry and enthusiasm, but I desisted long enough to smile up at the waitress.

"Now which would you advise me to have, Molly?"

Of all the girls who served in the Nonpareil Café I preferred Molly. Although some were younger and prettier, none was so skilled in her art, so keenly alive to her business, or so deft in handling an order. Hers was the perfection of years.

"Well, there ain't much choice," she confessed. "The meat is just common roast beef, and wooden at that. The fish is supposed to be Alaska salmon. We have a new cook on the dinner orders this week, anyway, and he's a tramp. Some of these men cooks are awful. I don't see how they get by. If a married woman was to dish such stuff up to her husband she'd be telling her side to the judge in about three weeks."

Laughing, I glanced up and happened to see the calendar on the wall, with its legend of "January, 1920." This, and Molly's reference to married women gave me an idea. I was in the mood for banter. So I suddenly spoke to her thus:

"Molly, don't you know this is Leap Year? Seems to me you girls would be taking advantage of your opportunities. Pick out a man and hogtie him. You know you won't always be young and fair."

I was not prepared for her reception of my raillery. She gave such a start that she spilled half of a glass of cracked ice and water on the tablecloth, and turned fiercely upon me.

"Say, don't you try to kid me about *that!* If you wasn't a friend of mine I'd be hitting you in the eye with the sugar bowl. I'm a peaceable and law abiding female, but just start pulling that Leap Year bunk on me and see what a roughhouse I'll raise!"

Her anger was so genuine I deemed it best to apologize.

"Now, now, Molly," I placated. "I didn't want to make you sore. I was just joking a bit. No offense meant, I assure you."

She smiled a trifle shamefacedly.

"No, I guess you didn't mean nothing. Likely you never did hear of the blamed mess, anyway. But so many have—and it gets tiresome being kidded forever and a day, and then a few more days for good measure."

My professional interest was immediately aroused, and very much aroused, too.

"Give me the details, Molly," I en-

treated. "A story is lurking back of this, I know."

"You bet it is! And that's just where it should be left lurking. If I tell you it'll be in print the next thing I know. Writers are worse than women when it comes to keeping secrets!"

"Now, Molly!" I remonstrated. "It isn't so dreadful to be put in a story. I'll make you the heroine if you tell me."

"Oh, I'm all of that," she observed. "What's the diff if I do spill it? Nearly everybody I ever knew has heard it, and they'll never forget it. I might as well let the whole world in on it, and do the job right. Here goes!"

She took a vacant chair at my table. It was between two and three o'clock in the afternoon, and the café was almost deserted. She began her story:

"When you called me young and fair just now you were kidding yourself or me—one or the other. I am ready to 'fess up to thirty legitimate birthdays, and that ain't young. Not nowadays, when girls at sweet sixteen knows more than their grandmothers at sweeter sixty. And I ain't any bear for looks. Miss de Milo and a lotta others has me cheated. And a woman has to be darn homely when she admits that. I'll tell you my face ain't never been my fortune in this hashing business. What tips I get ain't on account of my soulful eyes or the wonderful lights in my hair; it's because I remembered to have the eggs turned over easy or gave 'em a second dab of butter when they asked for it.

"When you asked me why I didnt take advantage of Leap Year and grab some male thing you meant it for a joke. But it ain't no joke to me. I'll tell you why. Four years ago it was Leap Year, too. And I wasn't any spring chick then. I began to talk to myself at times. I would mutter:

"'Old girl, you're due for the parrot and the cat by the fireside stuff unless you get busy. You gotta get a man by hook or crook. If the males won't hunt you up, just hunt them up.'

"Yes sir, I gotta crazy notion into my head. I made up my mind to be Leap Yearish right. I was on shift in a Portland, Oregon, hashery then. It was before I came here. A couple of the girls on the counter there started in at the Nonpareil this week and they revived the old bunk. That's what made me sore when you first spoke.

"Well, anyway, there was a young sport who used to come in there every day, and he had me going, no fooling. Honest, he did. I wondered if I couldn't grab him. If a guy falls for a girl hard he goes right out to land her. Why can't a woman do the same when she tumbles. Equal rights is equal rights.

"So, one morning when he was excavating through his hots, I remarked, casually:

"'I'd like some nice fellow to go with me to the show to-night. Want to breeze along?'

"He gives me a stare, and then tips me one of them wiseboy smiles. Gee, but he was a handsome guy! Just like one of those movie beauties.

"'I'm on, Bright Eyes,' he's beginning, when I interrupt:

"'None of that stuff. Lay off it. I ain't no wild woman or an amateur vamp. I mean serious business, I do.'

"He looks puzzled.

"'Well, you get my goat,' he says, 'but I'm game, lady. I'll tag along with you.'

"I had a regular plan in mind. I was gonna work the Leap Year stuff right. I was stuck on this young fellow. As I said before, why couldn't I take him along and later propose to him if I wished, just as if I was a man and him a pretty girl? Sounded reasonable to me.

"Well, sir, I took that bird to the show. I came out with the truth and told him what an awful hit he made with me, and I began a courtship with the reverse English, as the pool players say.

"And he fell for it.

"'This is sure something new to me,' he says, 'but I like it. You are a very original woman.'

"'Original nothing!' I tell him. 'Why ain't a woman gotta right to ask a man to marry her? Turn about is fair play. A girl deserves an even break with the males when it comes to seeking a better or worse half.'

"There was another wren in the hashery

at that time who had the stand next to me. She was one of those very cute little dolls, with the big eyes and smile. She had a husband, too; a worthless cuss who let her win the family bread and butter—likewise the hard cider and moonshine. He was an awful soak. Always as wet as Oregon weather.

"Well, his wife speaks to me about this mash of mine, as she calls him.

"'Say, Moll,' she says, 'you ain't thinking of marrying that guy, are you? Say, he never done a day's work in his life. Don't you marry them kinda guys.'

"'I know my business,' I says back, not too polite, either.

"'Friendly tip, that's all,' remarks Helene, which was the name of the doll. 'I married one of them union loafers and now I gotta support us both. It gets pretty tiresome.'

"'If my friend is williing to marry me I ain't afraid to support him. I don't mind working for a guy like Herbert,' I tells her. 'He looks like something, and that husband of yours resembles a second hand suit after a heavy rain.'

"'All right, Moll,' says Helene. 'Don't say I never told you so, after it's all over, though.'

"Well, sir, I kept getting thicker and thicker with Herbert—did I tell you that was his name? We went out to shows and dances and cabbeyrays and all them places of amusement and the devil. I footed all the bills for these joy jaunts, but I was willing. Not a single Jane in any of them places ever had a better looking male person to show off than Herbert. I was as proud of that man as of a new dress or a swell Easter bonnet. Gee, he was some looker!

"We keep up the merry gait for some time, and he seems to like it fine, so I tackle serious business one evening.

"'Herbert,' I says to him plain and straightforward, 'I want to settle down and have a home. I like you better than any guy I've ever seen. I know women ain't supposed to ask men to marry them, but I'm gonna take the plunge. How does it look to you?'

"He seems to figure a little bit. Then he looks at me.

"'I ain't got no job,' he says.

"'Well, I have,' I tells him, 'and my wages'll pretty near carry two along as well as one. If you want to work, all right. If you don't, it's all right with me. All I'm asking you to do is to marry me.'

"He agrees to become my husband and gives me a big smack. I thought I'd die from joy and happiness. I guess I was nutty. I know now I musta been.

"A few days pass. The hour for the big wedding approaches, and everything is rosy to me. The night before the fatal event—fateful, I mean—comes, and I'm waiting for Herbert to show up and take me home. But I stick around a long time and he doesn't come.

"Just as I'm getting good and peeved a guy blunders into the hashery. It's Helene's husband—that old walking whisky ad. He wants to know if I've seen his wife. I have not. She didn't come to work that day.

"'Then I know it's so,' the old wreck blubbers. 'She's run away with this guy. I found his photo on her bureau a week ago.'

"He pulls a picture out of his pocket and gives me a flash. They bring me to with a coupla gallons of drinking water.

"Yep; it was Herbert—my own handsome Herbert. He had run away with Helene. Seems they had been conniving a long time and I never guessed it. I got a letter from her a week after. Said she had taken my tip, and as long as she had to support a man, he might as well look like he was worth it. Herbert and her were very happy, and she hoped I wasn't too put out.

"Then she added insult to injury by offering to let me have her miserable old husband in exchange—the little cat! I ain't never seen nor heard of either her or Herbert since. Gee, he was some looker, the deceitful scoundrel!"

Molly sighed, and wiped a corner of her eye.

"So Leap Year means nothing in my middle-aged life, and—" she gave a sudden start. "Good Lord! I forgot you were trying to eat! Excuse me! I'll bring you the fish and meat both!"

The House With a Bad Name

by Perley Poore Sheehan

Author of "Upstairs," "If You Believe It, It's So," "God's Messenger," etc.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE ONE GREATEST THING.

"I'LL go into the house and I'll clear all this up for you," said Buckhannon.

Mélissine had told him all she knew. What was the mystery of this old house? Why did it have a bad name? Who was Mme. Jenesco, anyway? What was all this about Mélissine's father and Mme. Jenesco's mother? Why should Partridge have said that he was a thief when anybody would know that he wasn't a thief? Why should he have claimed that he was Mme. Jenesco's father when anybody could be equally certain that he was not?

"I'll go into the house and clear all this up for you."

A pretty big order; but Buckhannon felt equal to it. Didn't he, though! Good Lord, had there only been a dragon to fight—something like that! So he would right himself with his conscience. So he would purify himself. No, it wasn't on his own account at all. He was going to do this for Mélissine. If, afterward, when he had made his own confession, she should still deign to consider him— No— He wouldn't think of that part of it at all.

Not that Mélissine's own confession of bafflement and possible unworthiness had been put quite so clearly as the above questions may have implied. Half she said. Half she didn't say. Buckhannon's own riotous and rebellious thought supplied whatever was missing.

He felt the necessity for something that he could fight. That was all. And the main object of his antagonism was a very dragon indeed—to his imagination:

> And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color . . . . And upon her forehead was a name written: Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth!

If the truth be told, Mme. Jenesco suggested this description at this very moment—or would have done so, had there been any one there other than herself to behold.

She had greatly enjoyed that interview of hers with Buckhannon, even if it had not lasted so long as she might have desired. She was content. She was filled with memories—memories remote and memories recent. Some of these memories were running away back to her earliest dreams of love. She had been romantic then. She had then believed that love was a wonderful thing. Then she had known nothing of the deceptions of it, the brutal reactions of it, the limits. Limits which had been well defined; for Mme. Jenesco—although nothing at all of a philosopher in a theoretical sense—had always been a materialist. Nothing spiritual about her at all—not so far as she would ever confess. When you are dead, you are dead. "Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow you die."

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for February 28.

Nor was she any more spiritual at this present moment than she had ever been. Quite the contrary. Nevertheless, she was thinking how beautiful love was, how sweet it was, how different and better it was compared to the other pleasures, so called, in this world of bitterness and disillusion.

She had prowled about a little after Buckhannon had left her. She had recoiled her hair, luxuriously, in front of a wall-mirror. She had perfumed her hands and her breast. But she had remained dressed as she was. She had returned to the place where Buckhannon had left her. The sofa was luxurious. She made it more so with additional cushions. She loved luxury—as a spider, or a snake, or a panther in the jungle, loves luxury—with a complete abandonment to self and the interests of self.

She coiled up amid her cushions. The room was shadowy. The air of it was tepid—as if warmed of her own warmth; fragrant—as if perfumed of her own faunal fragrance.

And Buckhannon would return. He was nothing but a child—nothing but a boy—so crude, so impulsive, so unable to take care of himself—but such a lover! Love with him would be very sweet. There would be something about it to make up for all the pleasure that had not been hers in the pleasure she had sought.

She was lying there half dreaming in her sultry patience — visioning jungle vistas, thinking jungle thoughts—when she was aroused by the sound of a voice. Buckhannon's voice! Had he returned so soon? She listened. A glint of rage, as keen and deadly as a red-hot needle, penetrated her heart as she caught the vibrations of another voice and became aware that Buckhannon was in the company of Mélissine. The rage went out. It had been a mere glint. But it had left its pain. She would get even with Mélissine for this. Even so, it was the Jenesco's interest in Buckhannon that overwhelmed at her passions.

She had that passionate interest in him. She savored him with whatever she had of imagination. So sure she was of what the future held that she could even take a species of yearning, premeditated joy in seeing him now with another woman.

Hardly a woman, at that! What did Mélissine know about men!

It would be amusing to watch them. They hadn't seen her lying there amid her cushions — in the depths of the room — where the shadows were deep. It was lighter where they stood. And Buchannon's interest was so concentrated on Mélissine. Mélissine's interest so concentrated on him! They had come into the drawing-room from the hall—had passed there as if for a final consultation.

"So far as I am concerned," said Buckhannon, "I tell you that you are the only fact in the universe that counts. You are a fact." He caught his breath a little. He confronted her. He caught her hands in his. He spoke as a man speaks when it is the heart that speaks—what Emerson would have called the over-soul.

It was evident that Mélissine did not grasp his meaning. For that matter, it was evident that Buckhannon himself was groping for some meaning which as yet eluded him—a meaning too great for his powers of expression. Mélissine smiled up at him shyly. There was a sparkling moment when she held her breath.

"If God had never made anything else but you," he said; "it would have been enough. He would have been God—would have been the Creator."

"You shouldn't say that," said Mélissine, touched with awe.

"I do say it," Buckhannon returned, all devotion—devotion for Mélissine and the subject of his discourse. "God put you in the world so that we wouldn't forget—so that we wouldn't think that everything was wrong—bad—" He broke off. His declaration became more personal. "Oh, Mélissine! I was like that. I am like that still. But when I am here in your presence, I want to take all that is vile in me—crucify it—"

There were tears in his voice, but his voice, while soft, was passionate and clear. His eyes were brilliant. They burned. They burned with a quality that took the color from Mélissine's face, gave her a sort of unearthly quality that justified the nature of his tribute. She faltered a struggling sentence:

"All that you say I am to you, you are to me!"

There was no discordance in Buckhannon's action as he slid down to one knee—that was all devotional and apostolic—and hid his face against her dress and hand. He was the sinner demanding pardon.

On Mélissine's face was a mystical light.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE WHITE HUNTSMAN.

MME. JENESCO lay perfectly still. One would have said that even her thought lay still. No formula of words came into her mind at all. Even her passions were in abeyance. They say that certain wild creatures of the forest contain themselves like that in the presence of the unknown. There are even those who say that these brute things have the power of seeing many ambassadors from the unknown invisible to men—that most animals see ghosts and gods. Mme. Jenesco was like that now—although she may not have known it herself.

The chances were that she was not thinking of herself. Sentient, warm, coiled, furred, and as capable of swift physical brutalities as any animal, she lay there fascinated as might have been a coiled black tiger on the edge of a moonlit glade where a pair of strange white birds were mating.

It was only by degrees that her own sense of the situation developed into something else.

It was only by degrees that she could get the nature and the purport of what Buckhannon was trying to express. For this also was weird to the dominant strain in Mme. Jenesco's make-up. Love! She thought that she had known all about love. What she had taken to be love had been the chief occupation of her life. She had heard all sorts of men—and women, too—talk about it. She had watched their reactions when they were dominated by it. She had always known that it was complex—that some it rendered mean, some it rendered generous; some mild, some murderous.

But she had never heard or suspected anything like this.

"You are so small and so frail," said Buckhannon; "but you are the one indestructible thing. You are greater than kings or armies. You are beauty. You are perfection. The Lord of Hosts knew what He was doing when He made you the keeper of life. You are vestal of the universe. You are the keeper of the flame."

Mélissine laughed softly for sheer happiness. She said:

"If all men were so noble!"

"They would be if all women were like you."

"I am no better than any one else."

"You are not only the keeper of the flame," said Buckhannon, pursuing his thought, "you are the temple itself. You are the place of the ark. You are the holy of holies. You surpass the dream of Solomon. His temple was but a poor thing of metal and wood. You are better than cedar. You are finer than fine gold."

He was still on one knee. But he was no longer hiding his face. His arms rested lightly around Mélissine's waist. He was looking up at her. His eyes glowed. She was yielding to his embrace. She was smiling down at him. One of her hands was on his shoulder. With the other she lightly brushed his temple, his head.

"I have dreamed of becoming an architect," he said.

"You will become one of the greatest—you will become the greatest architect in the world," said Mélissine.

"But even if I become the greatest architect in the world," he pursued with reverent contemplation, "I shall still be humble—I shall still be crude. What is the work of any architect compared to the work of the architect who builded you? Where is there a foundation so miraculous as your feet? Not the foundations of the Pyramids! Where a tower of a million rooms that can sway to music, crowned with a capital like yours? Not in Pisa! Not in the brain of Leonardo, or Phidias, or Shakespeare."

He collected his thought—while Mélissine smiled, while Mme. Jenesco, unseen, groveled, so to speak, in her lair. He went on:

"When I look at you I see the great Taj Mahal. I see it shining white, reflected in

the lake, between the cypress-trees. I see it blue in the moonlight. I see it all pink in the glow of the Indian dawn. But, even so, O Mélissine, there is no loveliness there such as yours. The Taj Mahal was an aspiration. You are the thing aspired to. They aspired to a perfection like yours when they laid out the halls of Karnak, when they built and garnished the palace of old Sennacherib, when they swung up and planted the hanging gardens of Babylon. But they could build only with the stuff of the earth. You are of the fiber and fire of heaven."

The words brought recurrent stabs to Mme. Jenesco lying there. To her no man had ever talked like this. At times she couldn't see very distinctly, and it was as if her sight was beclouded with a sort of bloody mist. At times she no longer heard what Buckhannon was saying. This was when a whispering roar deafened her to all else—then when she was hearing again the things that men had said to her—when she held them in leash—when they knelt at her feet—when they put their passion in words—words to make her very soul to blush.

"You are the perfect idea," said Buckhannon with repressed fire, "the Greeks adored—when they reared their temples on the Acropolis. They had their Parthenon, but they had no Mélissine. What was ever any fane compared to you—the capitol of Rome—the arch of Constantine—the Coliseum—the Alhambra—Versailles—the cathedral of Rheims—or old Westminster, where the poets sleep!

"When they built St. Mark's in Venice they searched the wide world over for beautiful things with which to adorn it. God Himself did the same for you! You are as far beyond the design and building of man as sacred Fujiyama—as Mount Tacoma—as the valley of the Yosemite. You are the masterpiece. The Architect built the Sierras. He carved them with fire and ice and water. He planted the seeds of the first sequoia groves. Those trees! He made them gorgeous. He gave the trees a race of gods. He dreamed and worked and tried again. He experimented with flowers and waterfalls, dawns and sunsets. He made a billion billion lilies and roses, then fairies and saints. Then—you, O my Mélissine!"

"You are wonderful," said Mélissine.

Her words were a mere faint echo of the wonder in her eyes, her heightened color, her parted lips. She seemed to be yielding more and more to the magnetic coil of the arms that held her. Her body curved like the stem of one of those lilies Buckhannon had mentioned.

"When I look at you—and you look like this," said Buckhannon in a passion of tenderness and reverence, "I believe in the New Jerusalem. I believe in the city of gold, with gates of pearl. I do. And neither have I any need of sun or moon."

"Dear Eugene!"

"I love you," whispered Buckhannon.

"And I love you—I love you so!"

Mélissine was curving lower.

For some time now a certain chill had been creeping up about Mme. Jenesco—there, where she lay and watched this scene. A certain fear had begun to play about her like an impish light, cold and uncanny. She had tried to twitch the feeling away. She had tried to call her familiar resources to her aid. This was a comedy she was looking at. She ought to laugh. But she did not laugh. The actors were amateurs. She ought to hiss and boo. But she did not hiss or boo. Instead, something like a sob came up from her breast. She called this rage, and knew that it was not.

It was grief—a poignant grief. That was what it was. But a grief for what?

And while she was still trying to get this curious question adjusted in her brain, she felt a stab of pain, and the pain brought fear.

She was still the jungle beast. She was still the black panther. To some extent she was. But she was no longer lying in ambush, slumbrous, luxurious, with her lust for fresh blood. She felt that she was trapped. She wanted to get away from where she was but she could not. Here she was being thrust at. She was being killed by inches.

She was not only trapped.

But right over there back of this boy and this girl—back of this jungle pair of sacred white birds she had watched at their mating—it was as if a great white huntsman had appeared; it was as if this huntsman were

armed with bow and arrows. He was shooting her with his arrows. Each arrow was barbed.

"You thought you knew men!"

"You thought you knew love!"

"You thought you knew beauty!"

"You thought to defile what was pure!"

But she didn't move until Buckhannon and Mélissine were gone—not until what seemed to be a long time after they were gone. Then she sat up, somehow aware that her hurts were no mere matter of a passing fancy. She felt feverish. She felt disfigured and scarred.

Just what had happened to her? She didn't know.

She only knew that these cushions that had been so soft and tepid a little while ago were now become as hot cinders to her touch. The silk of her robe clawed at her skin like camel's hair. The perfume had become a stench.

She had difficulty with her breathing.

"God! God!" she gasped.

And she snatched at her robe with fingers like talons. She snatched it apart. This at least was an element of the self-expression she sought. She hated herself. She hated everything about herself. She clutched the silken stuff again. She wrenched it. She ripped it. She tore it.

As she started to her feet obedient to this same need of violence, she caught a reflection of herself in the mirror across the room. She had thought that she was beautiful. She had thought that she had made herself beautiful.

"Oh! Oh!"

Even her voice was ugly.

She beat at her face with her fists. She tore at her hair as she had torn at her dress. She called herself vile names. She was possessed with a frenzy of self-destruction. And all the time there were running in her brain the lava-streams of thought incident to this eruption. They were as logical, these thoughts of hers, as all primal things in nature.

She had sought love. She had sought beauty. It was these things that she had depended on that had betrayed her. She had betrayed herself. Sometimes, somewhere, she had heard that there was such a thing as a sin against the Holy Ghost, and that this was the one unpardonable sin. And this she had never understood. But now she understood. This sin, she had committed it.

"God! God!" she cried again.

But this time her accent was different.

She had hurled herself at last to the floor half recumbent against the sofa, still hurt and unappeased. But the paroxysm had passed. She was mute and still, even to the heart of her.

There Partridge found her.

Partridge had come into the room silently. He had been looking for her. Here she was. But Partridge looked and looked before he gave any sign of his presence. Even then he approached so softly that he was standing just over her before he spoke.

There may have occurred many thoughts to Partridge. It may have occurred to him that here was the daughter of that girl that Nathan Tyrone had found crushed and desperate one night more than thirty years ago. It may have occurred to him that this present girl was not to blame—oh, not to blame for anything! No one was to blame for anything, perhaps, if all the facts were only to be known. Of course, there were things that people didn't like—things that people should try to correct. But surely there was no place in the world for blame.

Judge not! Judge not! Sympathy and knowledge were better.

"There, there," said Partridge.

And it was almost as if he were speaking to Mélissine, and Mélissine a little girl again having hurt herself.

CHAPTER LVIII

OUT OF THE FULL HEART.

WHAT Partridge had come to tell Mme. Jenesco was that Mr. Buckhannon wished to speak to her. And Partridge gently urged her to do this. Not a word from Partridge as to what might have happened to her.

"I'm a nice one to see any one," said Mme. Jenesco. "I look like a freak."

The eruption had left her calm.

"Put a little cold water on your face," said Partridge, "and nothing will be noticed. You can go up to your room by the back way. They won't see you. I'll tell them that you are changing your dress."

"What does he want to see me about?"

"I don't know. I imagine he desires to question you."

"What about?"

Partridge was apologetic. His voice was kind. But he came out with the salutary truth.

"I imagine it is concerning your status—and mine."

"Yours!"

"I believe that Miss Tyrone has informed him—of my use—or misuse—of Miss Tyrone's money."

Mme. Jenesco laughed—a harsh little laugh, devoid, however, of either humor or offense. "Well, what shall I tell him?"

"I don't presume to give you advice," said Partridge.

"Give it anyway," said Mme. Jenesco. "I'd about as lief take your advice as the advice of any man I know."

"Thank you"—and there was no mistaking the fact that Partridge's gratitude was sincere.

"Go on!" Mme. Jenesco urged. "What do you advise?"

Partridge's voice was still apologetic to a degree. His whole attitude was apologetic and gentle.

"My advice," he said, "is merely to obey your conscience—say what your conscience dictates, and do what it tells you to do. And—and—don't be unhappy. If I can be of service to you in any way—"

"All right," said Mme. Jenesco, without apparent emotion. "Tell him I'll be down—I'll see him here—in fifteen minutes."

Mme. Jenesco was an entirely different woman from the one that Buckhannon had seen earlier in the day. She appeared to be. So she was in fact, most likely. There may be no such thing as a sudden conversion, but there are most certainly sudden changes of personality. Sometimes these changes are permanent, one personality being submerged or dying off altogether, some other personality coming up to play the dominant rôle in this theater which is the human body.

The tiger, the jungle-thing, had disappeared from Mme. Jenesco. For the time being it had, at any rate—slain by the white arrows of that mystical huntsman, possibly.

She was dressed differently—dressed in her favorite black, but decently and soberly.

Buckhannon had been the more embarrassed of the two. He had been expecting almost anything—almost anything but this. She greeted him almost as a stranger would have greeted him; but even this attitude was not exaggerated. She was neither friendly nor unfriendly. She was polite but not too polite.

There at first an impertinent small voice kept dinging at his brain: "A little while ago you were making love to this woman, and she was making love to you. You even thought that you might have to marry her. Didn't you? You were a fool. Weren't you? You thought that the whole universe had gone to blazes. Didn't you? This shows you how important you are."

"Sit down," said Mme. Jenesco. And she herself sat down. "What do you wish to ask me?"

"I wanted to ask you so many things," said Buckhannon. "They are things that concern Miss Tyrone's happiness."

Mme. Jenesco, in spite of her new poise, was too restless to remain seated. She seemed to be undecided as to just what to say. She was still undecided apparently as she turned and slowly walked to the end of the room and back again. During this slow promenade she did not once look at Buckhannon. There was no doubt but that she was doing some hard thinking. Both her voice and her bearing were changed when she next spoke. She had come to a stand in front of Buckhannon. She faced him rather as a man would face him. She was through with her rôle of enchantress.

"I'm going to talk straight to you," she said, then paused.

"I wish you would," he affirmed.

"I may be a fool," she continued, "but I'm going to trust you." There was a touch of grim humor about it when she added: "I swore I would never trust any man

again. Many a woman has sworn the same thing—but they go on trusting them."

Buckhannon spoke up: "I don't want you to say anything that you'll regret later. I'm thinking of Miss Tyrone."

"So am I," she answered, with slow thoughtfulness. "You love her all right. I don't have to be told. And she loves you. That ought to be enough, God knows! But it isn't. It never is. If it was, this earth wouldn't be such a rotten place to live on. I suppose I'll have to speak out. Otherwise, even if you and she do get married and go on loving each other you'll always have some doubt in your mind, and it 'll get worse and worse; then, some day, there 'll come some little quarrel or other, and the doubt will make it ugly."

"Oh, no," Buckhannon began; "that—"

But Mme. Jenesco stopped him with a gesture. Her attitude took on a tinge of challenge.

"When I first came here," she said, "I did have some vague idea that Nathan Tyrone was my father. At least, I pretended that I believed it—pretended even to myself. But it isn't so. I knew it wasn't so. Do you want to know what brought me here? I'll tell you. It was blackmail. That's what it was."

Buckhannon had sunk back in his chair. "What makes you tell me this?" he asked. He had chosen at random but one of the many questions buzzing in his thought.

"It's on my own account," Mme. Jenesco replied, with almost her first gust of real feeling. "It for my own sake. I'm making it as ugly as I can so that I won't try it again."

"Do you mean that you might have tried it again?" Buckhanon queried. He had been hearing about blackmail all his life, but now that he found it here right in front of him, so to speak, he was rather dazed.

"I don't know," the woman responded, desperately. "I might slip back."

"Slip back?"

"I've always laughed at this reformation stuff," she said. And she tried to laugh, but she didn't succeed very well. "I can tell you this, though, that I've been up against something too big for me ever since I came here. It's got me. I'm not myself. I'm not my old self. I'm changed. Just now, when we came in here together, I thought that I could con you. I thought that I could jolly you along. And I could have done it a month ago. Oh, it wouldn't have been anything against you. I know men, even when they're in love with a decent girl."

She was on the point of tears, but she was too strong to give in. Still, she was willing to be helped.

"What made you change?" Buckhannon asked.

Buckhannon felt that he had been groping in the dark hitherto. He felt now that over this darkness there had come a flush of red light. But whether this flush presaged the dawn of a better day or a fresh, impending catastrophe he was still unable to say. He sat there silent while Mme. Jenesco sought in her own mind that her answer might be just.

CHAPTER LIX.

BLOOD OF THE LAMB.

"THE girl was partly responsible," said Mme. Jenesco, as she resumed her pacing. "Any one else would have called the police. She didn't. She would have stood for anything. She was that kind. It would have been easier for me if she hadn't been such a saint. Oh, the world can say what it wants to about the clever ones, the cunning ones, the wise ones, the sort who never trust and who never believe. They're the marks. The really wise are the innocent."

All this disjointed, a bit tumultuous, while Mme. Jenesco kept up her restless pacing.

"I agree with you there," Buckhannon assented.

"But she wasn't everything," flashed Mme. Jenesco turning upon him as if for fear that he was already giving too much credit where the credit was not due. She drew a chair in front of him and plumped herself into it. She had forgotten herself by this time. "After all," she said, "it was the old man."

"Mr. Partridge?"

"Yes, Mr. Partridge."

She tried to sound Buckhannon's innermost thought with her eyes. Buckhannon perceived her concern.

"I've always felt that his intentions were good," Buckhannon affirmed.

"Say," Mme. Jenesco demanded, softly, "what do you know about him claiming to be my father?"

"Well, wasn't he?"

"If he was," said Mme. Jenesco with real reverence, "I'd get down on my knees and thank God—and also to ask his pardon for having led the kind of life I have led."

"I don't understand," said Buckhannon—not altogether truthfully; but he was baffled by her tone.

There was a touch of scorn in Mme. Jenesco's answer.

"You've lived here in New York, haven't you? And you've lived in Paris. You know something of the world. You don't think for a minute, do you, that a man like him could be my father?"

Buckhannon was a bit stifled.

"All sorts of women have had fine fathers," he said. "All sorts of women have fine qualities in them."

"It's because you're a boy you can say things like that," Mme. Jenesco returned, "that I'm talking to you like this now. But it's the old gentleman, I tell you, who has made me feel ashamed of myself. I'm not staying here now on my own account, I've lost my nerve, I tell you. You're going to think I'm lying; aren't you? You're going to say: 'Why, just now she was trying to vamp me, and now listen at her! Trying to work the old reform! Pulling the sob stuff!'"

"Not at all," Buckhannon declared.

"I'm glad of that," said Mme. Jenesco, "because I was never more earnest in my life. Even if that dear old soul wasn't my father I feel as if he was—I feel as I would feel if he had been."

"But if he isn't your father why did he say he was?" Buckhannon was at a loss.

"Because he was sacrificing himself. That was why. He said that he was my father so that no suspicion could fall on Mélissine's father or on Mélissine herself. He was sacrificing himself, I tell you. Do you know what that means? Most men don't."

"I'd be willing to sacrifice myself—for Mélissine," said Buckhannon, flushing slightly under Mme. Jenesco's gaze.

"I hope it's the truth," she said, without sarcasm. "They all say that—and some of them believe it—before they're married; but God pity most of the girls later on—when they are married, when they're not so good-looking, or when they're sick, or when they begin to get gray. I'm not knocking you, you understand. I'm merely telling that there are mighty few Partridges in this world."

"And you mean," Buckhannon demanded, "that he also sacrificed himself on your and your mother's acount?"

"How so?"

"By stealing all that money."

"He? I bet he never stole a nickel in his life."

"But he said he did."

"There's a mystery there," Mme. Jenesco confessed. "I believe that he lied when he said that he stole that money. My idea is that Mr. Tyrone sent us the money himself and that Partridge wouldn't admit it so that I wouldn't have even that leg to stand on if the thing came into the courts. I know that Mr. Tyrone was that sort of a man. He was that sort or he wouldn't have brought my mother here in the first place. And Partridge merely lied about himself to frame an alibi. Talk about your sacrifice! He would have let me send him to prison before he would have given me the chance to hang anything on the man whose servant he had been."

"But surely," Buckhannon said, "there was some other way. Partridge must have known that there was nothing to fear from the truth."

Mme. Jeneseco shook her head.

"Take it from me," she declared, "the truth is the only thing that the world is afraid of. Ask me, and I'll tell you that the so-called good people of this world are as afraid of it as the bad. Many a deacon would go and jump in the lake if he got a private tip that the police were next. That's nothing against them, you understand. It only means that the good and the bad have

got a lot in common. What makes the difference, after all? It's the heart. It's what you stand ready to do for some one else. It's willingness to be the goat. That's charity. That's sacrifice. That's what puts our Mr. Partridge above the level. That's what has made me ashamed of myself. That's what keeps me here."

"How so—keeps you here?"

"Because"—she let her voice drop to a whisper—"he's getting ready for a greater sacrifice."

"What?"

She looked at him meaningly, but Buckhannon couldn't grasp her meaning.

"You've told me this much," he said. "You might as well tell me all that there is to tell. I'm your friend. I'm Partridge's friend."

"I believe you are," she admitted, seriously. "I haven't found anything but friendship since I got into this house. Maybe that would be the case with the whole world if we only got to know each other better. There must be many an old grouch walking around with a broken heart. Many a tough girl has times, believe me, when she says her prayers, just like the other kind." She hastily ended this digression. She asked: "Do you know that little druggist across the street?"

"Yes."

"So do I. He told me. He's a liar about a lot of things but I know he told the truth this time. Partridge had an old prescription. He's had it filled."

But before Mme. Jenesco could complete her revelation, whatever it was, they heard a door click at the back of the hall. It was Partridge who closed a door like that. They heard his light footfall and they knew that he was approaching.

Neither Buckhannon nor Mme. Jenesco spoke as Partridge appeared at the door.

CHAPTER LX.

ONE DAY'S GRACE.

PARTRIDGE seemed to be absorbed in his own thoughts. His eyes were downcast. His back was bowed. Still he was not forgetful of his service. He went over to the windows and adjusted the shades, making sure that none of them varied by so much as an inch from the elevation of its neighbors. By the last window he stood for a longish spell looking out. The shutters of the old house were no longer kept so tightly closed—now that Nathan Tyrone was no longer there following the family tradition. Those closed shutters had meant "not at home" to purely theoretical callers, when Nathan Tyrone, and his father, and his grandfather, had been alive.

Buckhannon cleared his throat.

Partridge was so absorbed he did not hear.

"Oh, Mr. Partridge!" Buckhannon called.

"I am here, sir!"—and then Partridge recognized his mistake. There for a moment he must have thought that it was Nathan Tyrone who called him, in spite of that preliminary "Mr."

Then Partridge had turned with a start.

"Mr. Buckhannon, sir!"

He seemed to be relieved as he saw Mme. Jenesco's smile.

"I—I beg pardon," he apologized. "I thought the room was unoccupied." He himself smiled. And he would have retired at once, after the manner of a well-trained servant.

But Buckhannon stayed him. "I should like to speak to you also if I may," Buckhannon said.

Buckhannon had risen to his feet. Buckhannon was deferential and intended to show that he was deferential. But so was Partridge deferential. Partridge murmured something about always being at your service, sir.

"I wanted to tell you first of all," said Buckhannon, "that I have asked Miss Tyrone to—to confer the honor upon me—I know that I am not good enough—but nevertheless—you will understand—"

"Perfectly, sir."

Partridge was as calm as Buckhannon was agitated.

"I've asked her to marry me," Buckhannon plunged.

"Permit me, sir, to offer my profound congratulations."

This was straight from the heart. Partridge's voice was tremulous with emotion when he said it. But he wasn't all emotion. At the same time any one could have seen that he was thinking. Buckhannon wanted to say something about the possibility that it was not yet time for congratulations, but Partridge had reached the end of at least one train of thought. He put in with:

"Will you permit me, sir?"

Buckhannon nodded.

"But the late Mr. Tyrone started to tell you something, I believe, when the progress of his malady made it impossible for him to proceed."

"Yes," Buckhannon whispered. At least this item of the general mystery was to be cleared.

Still it was a second or two before Partridge could proceed. Partridge begged pardon. He used his handkerchief. He ventured an appealing look at both Buckhannon and Mme. Jenesco. A sense of delicacy caused Mme. Jenesco to stroll away and look at a picture.

"Mr. Tyrone spoke about it on the night of his death," said Partridge. "He commissioned me to give you his message should occasion arise. I dare say that it would be proper to do so now."

Buckhannon spoke urgently:

"You may tell me. I confess that I have often wondered what it was. But whatever it is, it will make no difference."

Partridge regarded him with an added shade of distress.

"I shouldn't say that, sir," Partridge quavered.

"But it's the truth." After all, this is no mere servant to whom he was speaking. This was Mélissine's friend—her best and oldest friend. "Do you think," he demanded, "that anything that any one could tell me about Miss Tyrone would make me think the less of her?"

He would have said more, but words failed to convey his idea of such a monstrous suggestion. Besides, Partridge was speaking again.

"Oh! Oh!" Partridge had exclaimed. "So that was it! You are worthy, sir—if you will permit me to say it; doubly worthy! And Mr. Tyrone, his spirit, will know, will bless you. That was the very nature of his message."

"What?"

"He wished to tell you that his daughter was not as other young ladies—that she was an angel; that only through a proper sense of this, and a proper devotion—I am but quoting what he would have said to you, sir—could any man, even you, sir—and you will understand—be worthy of her? That was what he wanted to say."

"And that was all?" Buckhannon succeeded in getting the question out after one long breath. There had come to him even the glint of hope that so would all darkness fade when the truth came out. "There was nothing else?"

"Nothing else, sir—except that Mr. Tyrone seemed to be convinced that you would show yourself to be worthy." Partridge met Buckhannon's eye. What he saw there was a confusion of thought, a sympathy for himself perhaps, and yet a glint of pain. "Did you think that there was something else?"

"You know that I did," Buckhannon answered quietly. "You know that I must have thought so."

"There was nothing, sir. Perhaps you will permit me, as one so long associated with the family—and honorably, I trust—at least as one who has always has Miss Tyrone's welfare deeply—oh, most deeply—at heart—"

Partridge cast a glance in the direction whither Mme. Jenesco had retreated. She was out of earshot. He brought his distressed old eyes back to Buckhannon's young and friendly ones.

"I wish to tell you, sir—"

Partridge spoke quaveringly, in a hurried, broken whisper, as one might who cons a full volume with but a limited time to do it in. And it did not help him at all, so far as coherence of statement was concerned, that just the various strands of music, silvery and faint, came drifting into the room. Mélissine, left to her own devices, had again turned to her harp. There were the first few preliminary chords, just to see that the instrument was in tune. But her mood must have been solemn.

The chords became unmistakable. An old and beautiful hymn:

"Nearer My God to Thee."

"I am aware," said Partridge, "that this has been a house with a bad name. There has been pride! But it has been an honorable pride. It was a pride I shared. I also suffered. But I have tried to keep the faith."

It was as if an angelic refrain furnished the overtone:

E'en tho' it be a cross
That raiseth me . . . .

"Mr. Partridge," Buckhannon began.

"Just Partridge, sir."

"Comrade," said Buckhannon. "Tell me what this secret is that oppresses you."

"There was none—"

"Yes there was, and is. Let me share it."

There was negation on Partridge's lips, but his eyes could not lie. His eyes spoke now. His eyes were saying that there was something—oh, that there had been something all along; that not for anything in the world would he reveal to her who played the harp back there. But so were there words in Buckhannon's steady look. The words constituted a demand that Partridge yield his secret.

Just then the music stopped. The harpist let out a hail:

"Where is every one? May I come in?"

"Not a word, sir. Not now," Partridge implored.

"When then?" Buckhannon demanded.

"To-morrow," said Partridge. "Yes; I think that I may tell you, sir; that by to-morrow everything will be cleared up."

"No foolishness," said Buckhannon soberly.

"Ah, no, sir," Partridge promised; "the Lord be my witness!"

CHAPTER LXI.

"ULALUME."

THIS was the eve of the second day of June—a date important in the history of many a New York family, but no more important than other dates to other families; a date important enough to the denizens of Cinnamon Street, however, more important than they presently suspected.

Still, one would have said that old Mr. Partridge knew, seated up there in that chaste and somewhat monkish room of his on the top floor of No. 6. For Partridge, even more than usual, was meditating on the respective blessings of life and death, his eyes fixed on that calendar that Mélissine had given him. His eyes were on the date, and, although he was long past seeing either date or motto, he had the date by memory:

June 2: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace!"

"The end of that man is peace," Partridge repeated to himself; "the end of that man is peace. Ah, blessed promise! How many toil and sweat and tremble; how many strive, how many hunger, how many soothe a sick child or hunt for the child that is lost? And yet their ends shall be peace."

But all this part of the old gentleman's thought was like the quivering end of a search-light: soaring high, picking out clouds no human eye could see, losing itself in infinities; while all the time the director of this search-light had his feet on earth, and he himself preoccupied with earthly problems. "Even if I told Mr. Buckhannon—no, I cannot tell him. But I have promised."

The problem was difficult.

"He is the soul of honor," said Partridge. "He is a gentleman. I know that he would never mention the matter to Mélissine were I to ask him not to do so. But have I the right to put a secret between them at the very outset of their nuptial career—put a serpent, belikes, in their garden? Guidance, O Lord!"

And ever that answer from the other part of his brain:

"The end of that man is peace!"

"I am far from perfect," said Partridge; but something of the Tyrone pride spoke up within him, and he added: "and yet have I tried. It is not too late. It is never too late. Grant that I be perfect—just this once—that I may know peace, and give peace."

To the highly imaginative—had there been such familiar with all the circumstances—it would have seemed that the dark angel was in Cinnamon Street this night undecided as to which of two old men he should choose; the dark angel, Azrael, who hovers over the dying—although many of these do not know that they are such—and helps the soul to quit the body; undecided and hesitant, although to-night he will be busy as usual. To-night, in New York alone, from fifty to a hundred will require his presence, mostly old people, like these certain two old men of Cinnamon Street, or the very, very young.

The other old man is Goodenough, the poetic cabby.

Early this night he had come weaving into Cinnamon Street, "with vine-leaves in his hair," as the poet said. He had been on his way to the hay-mow that was his home; he who had been so gallant these thirty years agone. But the churchyard had called him. Perhaps it was the fragrance of the locust-bloom. Perhaps it was the memory of the young people he had seen loitering there earlier in the day. Perhaps it was an earlier recollection.

In any case he had watched with vinous cunning to make sure that the policeman, Hickcock, was not on this part of his beat. He was in no mood for such an audience as Hickcock even might give him, although talking to Hickcock was like talking to a tree or a troll.

Goodenough passed, therefore, unperceived through the gate by the chapel and found himself in the fragrant depths of a seclusion such as the churchyard furnished him. He found a place where the grass was deep. There he composed himself to rest and meditate. He was in one of his most poetic states; lulled, body and brain, by the wine he had taken; but that inner self of his awake, upstanding, with alabaster fingers ready set to the strings of a golden lyre.

So he perceived himself.

So he had often perceived himself before.

But this night it was altogether different, and he discovered this with a thrill of happiness.

Hitherto there had always been the subfeeling that presently the fumes of the wine would pass, and that he would wake up again, and that once more he would be Goodenough the sodden, Goodenough the cabby, old Goodenough, the man with the face he was ashamed to look at. But now he was the poet of the golden lyre. He saw himself standing slim and graveful, an Apollo, with smooth, round arms and legs, curly hair crowned with laurel. The lyre was solid to his touch. He smote the strings. He heard a quaver of melody so rich that it brought the tears to his eyes—tears of gratitude that there should be such music.

Then a queer thing happened to Goodenough—a very queer thing. It was something he wished he could set down in immortal verse for the instruction and solace of all such as he.

He was in two places at once. He was two persons at once. Nay, three! One of him was the Goodenough he had stretched on the grass. The other of him continued to be the godlike creature of the lyre. And some sort of a struggle was going on between the two, with himself aware of the fact, somewhat as a third personality, but unable to intercede except by a sort of mute desire. He wanted the godlike creature to win. And this hadn't been going on very long before another spectator had joined the group—subsequent events proved that this may have been Hickcock. And to him the Goodenough who was godlike cried out:

"Friend Azrael?"

"Come along," said Azrael. "I will give you a hand."

"I have loved you; I have sung to you," said Goodenough the godlike. "I knew that you would not fail me now."

"Why came ye here?" asked Azrael.

"I sought her:

> "—were stopped by the door of a tomb—
> By the door of a legended tomb;
> —Ulalume—Ulalume—
> 'Tis the vault of thy lost Ulalume."

Then Goodenough experienced a slight shock, a dissolution of all that had kept him uncertain, and he had become merged utterly with the godlike one, so that he himself was the godlike one and the godlike one

was he. Suddenly his limbs were light. His back was supple and strong. His soul was music.

He felt nothing but joy even when he heard the angel Azrael—or was it Hickcock?—cry out that he was dead, that Goodenough was dead. For Goodenough himself knew better. He, the real Goodenough, was never so much alive. This was youth. This was of the very essence of life—life everlasting. He smote his lyre again, and this time there was the stirring of a thousand musical echoes; like the free concert of the choral society he had once attended: "Glory to God in the highest!"

But right in the midst of this joy unspeakable he felt the pang of a yearning. He would seek her now—the one he had come to seek. Caparisoned like this he would show himself to her.

And all this time, there at a darkened window in No. 6, a window that overlooked the chapel-yard, was Mme. Jenesco, the woman who was the daughter of her whom Goodenough had loved and who may have been, most likely was, Goodenough's own daughter. No wonder some sort of an extra pang came to her, although she knew nothing of what was going on there under the locust-trees and among the tombstones; no wonder she felt an extra pang of loneliness!

To whom could she turn? There was only one. And yet she thought of him with a sudden start, for she had thought again of that prescription that Partridge had had filled.

"What if, after all—"

Terror winged her feet as she fled through the dark and silent old house in the direction of Partridge's room. She sped up the dark stairs—a mere ghost of a woman; a mere ghost of her former self.

CHAPTER LXII.

SO MUCH FOR SO MUCH.

IT may be mentioned here and now that Goodenough—the earthly part of him at any rate—did die this night.. Late in the night he had been discovered by his friend, the policeman of this beat, Jerome Hickcock by name.

"At first," said Hickcock, "I was for thinkin' him drunk again, especially when he begins to pull the old poetry on me again, and to talk about the dame he was stuck on once. 'Come along,' I says, 'I'll bed you down,' I says. You know, sort o' jokin'. And with his hand in mine—a dom fine man; a man wit' a heart."

A great funeral they gave to Goodenough. Hickcock was for paying for it himself, but Plin saw to that—Pliny the younger. "He was no good any more," said Pliny; "but he was a friend of my old man's."

Epitaph enough for any old gentleman.

Partridge was forgetful of all else when he heard a knock on his door. It reminded him of old times—when Nathan Tyrone was young and sought his company, or when Mélissine was a little girl. He raised himself from the edge of his couch with surprising agility. He was at the door in a moment, had flung it open. The candle flickered in the sudden gust of air. For a moment he was seeing no one. Then he saw her.

"Mme. Jenesco!"

"I—I wanted to talk to you," she said.

She had undressed herself for the night, but she had drawn a peignoir over her nightdress. There was no paint on her face.

"Pray come in," said Partridge. He stood aside to let her pass.

She looked about her—the one candle flickering in its porcelain candlestick, the open but shuttered window where a scant and worn but perfectly clean chintz curtain fluttered on its cotton string, the small white dresser, the solitary wooden chair, the narrow white cot.

"You were still up," she said.

It was an allusion to the fact that Partridge was still fully dressed.

"I seldom retire early," he said. "And"—he hoped she would not think that he was blaming her in any way—"here lately I have not been sleeping very well."

"Oh, was that—"

"Won't you be seated?"

She sat down. "I was worried about you," she said, changing the current but not the purport of what she had started to say. "I've seen enough of the world where

such things happen. I knew about your buying that chloral."

"Oh!" said Partridge. He looked at her a little more intently

She had seated herself. She sought for a time to avoid his eyes, but finally she faced him as he resumed his place on the edge of his cot. A little color came into her pale face.

"I've been pretty rotten," she said, "but I didn't want that on my conscience."

"Want what on your conscience?"

"Wasn't it for that you bought the chloral?"

"You mean—to destroy myself?"

"Yes."

"Oh, no," said Partridge softly. "That was merely a sleeping potion that Mr. Tyrone formerly used—quite harmless when properly taken—"

He continued to look at her. She seemed to be still unconvinced.

"I've known a girl or two who took it for the other reason," she said. "They took it because they wanted to be rid of it all."

"Girls? When they had youth—"

"That's what got their nerve," Mme. Jenesco enlightened. "It wouldn't have mattered so much if they were old. Then it would have been over for them before long anyway. But, being young, and knowing that they might go on getting the rotten end of it for another fifty years or so—oh! I don't blame them! I don't blame them!"

Partridge reflected.

"I know that there is suffering in the world," he said. "I know that there are so many things that we do not understand, that it does seem at times as if life were in vain, times when we say: 'What does it all amount to?' But, even when the world is darkest, there is a candle lighted somewhere in the depths of us—"

His thought became so spiritual that his voice was insufficient and flickered into silence.

"There are a lot of things you don't know about," said Mme. Jenesco, not without sympathy.

"True," said Partridge. "I have been spared many things. I have been granted many blessings. I seem to have forgotten them here of late. I have tried; there has been something—" He bowed his head, suddenly tired and weak.

The spectacle of his bowed head, so clean and glistening white in the candle-light, seemed to move Mme. Jenesco greatly.

"Listen," she said. "I'm sorry that I ever said what I did. I'd rather die myself than make you any trouble. I'll go away to-morrow, and you'll never hear of me again. I swear I will. Don't be so broken up. I can't stand it to see you like that. I'll go back to the old life, I will, and take what's coming to me. It's all I'm fit for. I didn't know that there were people like you in the world. I merely thought that there were the rich and the poor, the lucky and the unlucky, God's favorites and the Godforsaken. I was tired of being one of the outcasts. I wanted—peace!"

Partridge did not yet look up. Perhaps she thought that he hadn't heard her. She kneeled down in front of him and tried to lift his face.

"Old man," she coaxed.

"What is it?" Partridge's voice was thick but mild.

"Think of me," she said. "I've come nearer to loving you than I've ever loved any one in the world before. My mother was no good. They were a joke to me—all these mother-songs."

"You shouldn't say that, my child," Partridge gently reproved.

But she pursued her line of thought.

"And as for a father! Wouldn't I be proud, though, if I had a father like you! I'd tell the whole world so. And I'd show the whole world by being decent, I would. God, when I think how I treated you—the things I said to you! But you'll forgive me, won't you?"

"I forgive you; and I dare say so will he."

This latter statement, and some train of associated thought, seemed to move Mme. Jenesco more even than she had already been moved.

"You've made me think," she said; then there was a catch in her voice. "You've made me think that the world wasn't so bad—and that I wasn't so bad—"

Without visible transition it was now she who was the comforted, and it was Partridge who was the comforter. She had put her face on his knee, while her shoulders shook; he had put his hand on her head.

"I—I never had a father," she said.

Partridge looked at the calendar. When he spoke his words were a declaration:

"You have now," he said.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE SECRET.

THEY let this little storm of emotion through which both of them had passed subside into peace. They let this peace take possession of them. For Partridge, at least, the cheap calendar on the wall was become as the sun, and the light of it was on his face.

". . . . for the end of that man is peace!"

For the time being, even New York seemed to slumber. A fitful breeze stirred the scant white curtain, and the curtain went gaily playful.

"What is your real name?" asked Partridge. "What is your real Christian name?—Mary? Susan?"

"My name is Belle," Mme. Jenesco replied.

"Belle!" said Partridge. "The word for beauty. It is a beautiful name. You'll be my child, Belle. I—I never thought that I should be so fortunate. I dare say that you will be provided for. There must be some way."

Belle took Partridge's hands in hers. She looked up into his face. She studied him with rapt devotion.

"You never stole that money," she said.

Partridge closed his lips and his eyes. He let his chin sink on his breast. He meditated. But when he opened his eyes again he was calm and strong.

"We shall trust each other now," he said. "It would have been better had I trusted you all along."

"Don't you worry," she said. "Even if you did. That won't make any difference. They shouldn't have kept you working here all these years at a servant's salary."

"Oh, no!" said Partridge gently. "The Tyrones were ever generous. Just shortly before Mr. Nathan Tyrone undertook his last voyage to Europe he told me to increase my salary—to double it, in fact."

"*I* shouldn't say anything," Belle assented softly, remembering favors received.

"Neither of us should say anything," Partridge pursued. "He was a proud man and a reserved man. He had no more idea of the value of money than a little child would have had. When he was little, his father placed a hundred dollars to his credit in the bank. He drew but one check against this sum. This was a check for the entire amount that he gave to a blind man—a blind man who, it developed, could see."

"No wonder you were tempted!"

"I *was* tempted. You see, Mr. Nathan's father was aware of his son's weakness. And there had been that unfortunate estrangement. They were both proud men. When the elder Tyrone was near death he called me to his bedside. He was still bitter against his son. He was bitter against the foreign woman Nathan had taken to be his wife, although the elder Tyrone had never seen her—had always refused to see her. There, I suppose that they have met in heaven, now, and entered into the truce. But it was hard upon me. Yes, I confess that the door was opened to temptation—to pride, to worldliness. Had Nathan ever suspected the facts, that would have been an end of it."

"You mean that he would have driven you out."

"It would have driven him out."

"Driven him out of his own house?"

"It was no longer his own house."

"You mean—"

"That the house was left to me."

"You mean that this house—this house we're in now—doesn't belong to the Tyrones but belongs to you?"

"Yes."

"Since when?"

"Since the death of the elder Tyrone."

"Seventeen years ago."

"Eighteen years, this coming month."

"And you staid on as a servant?"

"I have never been ashamed of my position."

"And you never told?"

"Had a breath of it reached Mr. Nathan—or his daughter—they would have left. They were kind to me. I may say, even, that they were fond of me. You could not have expected, though, a Tyrone to accept charity from a servant. And there was no other way. The will was drawn by Judge Bancroft, a very able lawyer. There were provisions that made the will unbreakable. And, even had we attempted to break it, there would have been the publicity, the scandal, which would have made the matter worse."

Mme. Jenesco had difficulty in getting a clear survey of the situation even after this revealing talk. She sat there gazing at the truth rather than at her adopted father's face. Partridge's face itself was inscrutable — too white, too bright — gentle and kindly, but capable of inspiring awe. The face of many an old man is like that when the physical shell is worn thin.

"But the money," said Mme. Jenesco.

"Aye, the money," said Partridge.

"Who got that?"

"It went with the house."

"Yours?"

"In the eyes of the law."

"And it was your money that they were spending all these years?"

"Mine only in the eyes of the law. In the eyes of God it could have been nothing but a trust."

Belle was moved to laugh, but there was no irreverence in it, nor very much of humor. Her mind was stirred; that was all. The situation was becoming clearer.

"And he raised your pay out of your own money! Didn't you say anything?"

"What could I say? The least hint would have been fatal. Judge Bancroft, a man of the utmost probity as well as learning, had fallen in with my plan long ago. It was simple. Mr. Nathan entrusted all financial matters to me, even to the smallest details. And I was old. I had expected that my own demise would precede that of Mr. Nathan by many years."

"How would that have helped?"

"I had drawn a will of my own—one that would have made certain of its return to the rightful owners."

"The Tyrones?"

"The Tyrones!"

There followed a long silence. Belle studied the old man's face, as an earnest scholar might have studied the face of an ancient manuscript. He did not try to avoid her scrutiny. Neither of them smiled. There was a sadness, and a knowledge of the world, in the face of each of them.

"Did you mean it—just now," she whispered, "when you said that you would be a father to me?"

"I did—though poor and unworthy—"

"You're neither," she said. "You're one of God's own noblemen. Listen! You won't get mad, will you? You said you would be my father. You said that you meant it. You've got to let me be a daughter to you. You will, won't you? Don't say you won't. You're the first person I really ever wanted to do anything for."

"Why, God bless you!" said Partridge.

"But I've got a little money," Belle hurried on. "It ain't much. But it 'll be enough for you and me. It don't matter where I got it. It don't matter how I got it. Not if I put it to a good use. Tell me that it don't. I want to be good. I want to be good for the rest of my life. Oh, honest to God I do!"

She checked a sob. The better to check it she got to her feet. She tried to smile. But the things that Partridge was trying to tell her—with his eyes as much as by word of mouth—merely made matters worse.

She had crossed the little room to where the calendar hung. It was mere chance that she rested her head against the calendar. The shadow of her head—dark red, like that of one of Heller's Magdalenes—blotted out the text of the day, but another text gleamed out:

"Knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope."

CHAPTER LXIV.

ERE FADES THE ROSE!

PERHAPS something of all this came to Eugene Buckhannon in his sleep. Such things must happen. There must be some system whereby intelligences react

on intelligences in ways unguessed and undevised by man—else whence come all the poems of the world, the prophecies, the loves at first sight, the sudden fads, fervors, and contagions?

In any case, Buckhannon arose from a sleep that was sound—and dreamless, so far as he was aware—but knew straightway that he had gained wisdom. "The night brings counsel," says the Frenchman; which is but another way of saying, "After darkness, dawn!"

So Buckhannon reflected.

Why worry? Why not seize the present good? Why search for gloom when the sun was shining? Why dig up trouble? Wasn't the world constantly letting the gifts of the gods go to waste through anxiety as to what might be coming next? Useless anxieties! Vain fears! Idiotic glooms!

There was that thing that old Mr. Partridge was going to tell him, for example. What in the devil did it amount to, anyway—so long as Mélissine lived—and loved him—him Buckhannon! All this while he was making his toilet with more than the usual care—bath, shave, immaculate silk and linen.

It didn't occur to him, except subconsciously, perhaps; but he believed in the *Lochinvar* type; so had all of his clan—to ride in and carry off the delectable bride and to meditate on the consequences thereof afterward. As good a way as any, to judge by the consequences as manifested by the family thus far. There was happiness as well as beauty in those various old homes of Tennessee known as this or that Buckhannon place.

Buckhannon visualized such a place now—the place that would be all his own some day: big old Colonial house, lofty white pillars, three or four acres of dooryard filled with grass and ancient trees, two hundred acres more or less of rich farmland swelling away to meet the acreage of other Buckhannons; then, most of all, Mélissine the mistress of this domain. He saw her garbed in white out under the trees. He saw her presiding over the family table when there should be guests—gallant men and other beautiful women. He saw her at her harp in the old-fashioned parlor — heard her music, strings and voice, as he smoked his cigar in the moonlight out on the porch.

The suite of reveries had brought his enthusiasm to its highest pitch, and himself to Cinnamon Street, at just about the time that Mélissine had finished breakfast. Once more it had been Mélissine who had answered to his knock. She hadn't been expecting him so early, but she had experienced a lurch of hope—hope for what she couldn't have told. Only, she had been feeling blue. There had been an anxiety upon her not less disquieting because vague.

For, what *was* that thing that Partridge had been keeping to himself? *Why* was he going to impart this secret to Eugene and not to herself? *Was* it a family disgrace? *Was* it something that was going to make her a figure of scorn? What if Eugene *should* go away—and leave her—and never see her again?

She had wrestled with her soul and had come to the decision:

It would be better that she suffer such a fate, even if it killed her, than that she should bring upon him some disgrace.

All this in Mélissine's head and in her breathless bosom as she sped through the hall to open the door. And something else:

She would not kiss him!

Ah, no! All that was over and done for until Eugene and Grandy had had their talk. She would be reserved. She would hold herself aloof. She would do nothing to embarrass him.

And there, almost before she knew it, Buckhannon had sprung into the hall, had slammed the door back of him. One of his arms was about her waist, one of his hands was back of her head. He had crushed her to him. There was no escape. Oh, she wouldn't have had enough strength to escape anyway even if he had held her with nothing but cobwebs.

"Eugene! Oh, my Eugene!"

She had just enough strength to pant his name.

But into this cry of hers she was throwing all the hope that this world held for her.

And what was this that he was telling her?

"Get your hat! Get your hat and come along!"

"Where?"

"To City Hall!"

She was so innocent of worldly affairs that she had to ask what for. As a matter of fact he was almost as breathless as she was and inclined to be incoherent.

"That's where we have to go to get the license," he told her.

"What license?"

"We're going to get married!" he gusted.

They escaped from the house Heaven knows how—Mélissine so excited that she could hardly get her hat on, Buckhannon urging her to come along hat or no hat. Mélissine had flung the message over her shoulder to such as might hear that she would be right back. But Buckhannon would stand for no further delay. Buckhannon was *Lochinvar*.

And it thrilled Mélissine to the very marrow to be ordered about like this. It would have been fine to be dignified and aloof; but this was infinitely finer yet! Her surrender was complete. Who wouldn't have surrendered in the face of such overwhelming force?

But she did become a little frightened once they were down in the License Bureau. Perhaps this was because Buckhannon was a little frightened himself. He tried to conceal this; and then, when he couldn't conceal it, to pass it off with a joke to the effect that he had never been here before. But he soon stiffened up. And so did Mélissine.

There were so many people there to look at them! And all these people had to be encouraged.

One would have said that the business of getting married had suddenly become the principal occupation of New York—colored folks down from Harlem, gay with grins and Sunday clothes; Italians, Hunkies, Russian Jews, Armenians, Japanese.

"You can't blame them for looking at us," Buckhannon whispered. "We're the only Americans present."

"But the girls all look as if they felt—just like I do," Mélissine returned, smiling up at him whitely.

"Cheer up," he comforted. "It isn't as bad as it seems."

But Buckhannon's own heart—and his new-found sense of authority—failed him when he and Mélissine arrived in that upper chamber where the actual ceremonies were being performed. Here the couples were lined up two by two—like animal candidates for some new Noah's Ark of Matrimony—while the grinning and tearful relatives looked on and a brace of aldermen went through the formula from "You-Sam-Brown-An'-you-Alice-Jones" on down to "Kiss-your-bride."

Buckhannon could feel Mélissine tremble at his side. It was a tremor that had a response within his own anatomy, from crown to heel, with the center of the disturbance in the pit of his stomach.

His condition became such that he turned to Mélissine for consolation. It spoke well for the future of both of them perhaps that it was she who was ready with her consolation now—not only ready with that but with a solution for the thing that was troubling him.

She caught his hand in hers. There was no one looking. She pressed his hand to her breast.

"Not here," she said. "I know a better way."

CHAPTER LXV.

"LET HIM FOREVER, ETC."

IT must have been a test of faith and courage, too, for Mélissine, this proposal of hers. Back there in the old house—which, in a way, was as much a house of mystery for her as it had always been for the other dwellers in Cinnamon Street—was Partridge, with that secret of his, whatever it was. Would Partridge speak now? And when he did speak, was what he would say be something that might still make this Heaven-Selected mate of hers draw back?

To Mélissine, it was as if they were married already, she and her Eugene. It hadn't been so while they were awaiting their turn in the License Bureau. It hadn't been so even after the license had been handed over to them. The feeling that they were married had come to her only when he had turned to her, just now, with that look of distress and appeal in his eyes.

She felt almost as if she were a mother to him. Wouldn't she always shield him, though? Wouldn't she fight for him—slave for him—pray for him—yield herself to him heart and soul? But not that, O Lord! Not that! "It would kill me should anything happen now to keep me from giving him my life!"

Her proposal was this:

The old pastor of the abandoned chapel next door to No. 6 was still alive. For years he had been a pensioner of the Tyrones. It was he who had read the burial service over Mélissine's father, and over her grandfather. Wouldn't it be fine to go and get him to marry them?

Buckhannon thought that it would.

And wouldn't it be fine to get the old gentleman to come to No. 6, so that the wedding could be celebrated there?

Buckhannon was sure of it. He was feeling safer now that he had the license.

"And it will be just as if father were there," thrilled Mélissine softly; "and mama, and Grandy, and poor, dear Mme. Jenesco!"

Buckhannon was already beginning to feel as any bridegroom might feel on the eve of a fashionable wedding. The women control such events. But he arose to the occasion.

"And you could put on one of those Vallière dresses," he said; "such as your father loved—and I love."

"Mother's wedding-dress," cried Mélissine.

"And we could put up a lot of flowers—make a floral chapel," Buckhannon proposed, his mind running back to something of that nature that he had seen out home in his childhood. Not that it mattered very much. Not for him. Nothing mattered for him except that they should be married, and that he should make Mélissine happy for the rest of her days. (People in the street looked after them and smiled.)

He was making her happy now. There was hardly a ghost of a cloud left on her horizon, even if there was that much. She had her Eugene to thank for that. And she did thank him from the bottom of her heart to the top of her soul. And her soul soared heavenward.

"I suppose that the time has come to tell you, sir," said Partridge.

This was the first moment that he and Buckhannon had been alone together since Buckhannon returned to the house with Mélissine from the City Hall. There had been much to do. There had been a stress of emotion quite apart from these external activities.

"Tell me nothing," said Buckhannon, clapping an arm about Partridge's shoulders.

"It has to do with certain financial arrangements, sir," said Partridge. "You may know that I have been entrusted for a number of years with the stewardship of the Tyrone fortune."

"Listen!" Buckhannon commanded.

He and Partridge were in the drawing-room. All the doors were open. There came a froth of music, a clash of feminine voices, then music again. That was Mélissine making her first attempt at the "Wedding March" from "Lohengrin." The wedding was to be celebrated in the music-room where all the Tyrones could bear witness. In there they had constructed the floral arch—pink roses, chiefly, from the climbing vines at the side of the house. It seemed as if the music and the voices constituted a breeze, and as if this breeze blew into the drawing-room now, bringing the fragrance of the flowers along.

But presently these sounds ceased, and Partridge was for speaking again.

"I feel that it is my duty," he began.

"Tell me this," Buckhannon interrupted. "Is it something that concerns Mélissine?"

"It is, sir."

"Does she know anything about it?"

"No, sir. It was something that I never even communicated to her father."

"I see. It's some secret that you have been keeping to yourself all these years."

"It was because—"

"Never mind! Don't tell me anything unless I ask," Buckhannon ordered with friendly authority. "And would it disturb Mélissine's happiness if she knew anything about it?"

Partridge nodded an affirmation that was a signal of distress.

"Well, then," said Buckhannon, "why, for the love of Mike, do you want to say anything at all for? You're devoted to her, aren't you—you're her Grandy, aren't you—you want to see her happy for all the rest of her days, don't you?"

"Heaven grant it!"

"Shake hands," said Buckhannon. They shook. But Buckhannon could see that Partridge was still far from being convinced that all was well.

It was with the purpose of further persuading him that Buckhannon said:

"Whatever it is, keep it dark. I had a grandfather once who used to say that secrets and mystery and things like that were all that kept folks from committing suicide. It makes life like a story. We go on reading, or living, just to see how it's going to end."

And that was all of what Partridge might have had to say. It was, until later in the day, when the old preacher arrived—he who had been a pensioner of the Tyrones (not to say of Mr. Partridge) for so many years—and Mélissine, tremulous, was dressed in the bridal gown that had been her mother's; all this, and so on down through the ceremony to that part of it where the old preacher said that if there was any one who had something to say why the marriage should not take place, let him say it now or forever afterward hold his peace—"

The preacher was very old. He had lost his place. Perhaps there, for a moment or so, he had even forgotten what he was quite about. Was this a marriage or a funeral—a christening or an examination of candidates for admission to the church?

There was a silence.

Under the floral arch that had been constructed where Nathan Tyrone had lain, Mélissine and Eugene were kneeling side by side. His head was down—like the head of a young knight about to be accepted into the companionship; but Mélissine's face was uplifted, seraphic. So might her mother have looked twenty years ago—the blond curls, the same tender curves that made a profile of strength and grace, and that expression in her eyes that most brides have—the look of him who stood on a peak in Darien and saw the Pacific—that ocean of mystery and enchanted islands.

Just back of them the two living witnesses—old Partridge, very white, apparreled in his best, and then, the Woman in Black.

Partridge was so moved that every now and then a little click came into his throat that was almost audible. His face was the face of age, long-suffering and holy, the physical part of it burned away, nothing left but the transparent spirit, so that to look at him made you imagine that he was there merely as the envoy of some foreign court, and that once the ceremony was over he would soon be gone.

But was Partridge going to speak? He knew everything. Was there something he had to say why this marriage should not be?

Again, there was Mme. Jenesco — still the Woman in Black, but no longer the Woman of Babylon. Steadily, steadily, at fixed intervals—like the flow of certain geysers—two tears overflowed from those well-deep eyes of hers.

Wasn't she going to have something to say? She also was deeply versed in the accumulated wisdom of the world. Was she going to say the preventive words? "Stop! Marriage is a fraud! Run wild, my sisters! Look at me! What is purity—old-fashioned goodness—mothers — and grandmothers! Behold this bride! Corrupt her—send her to the streets—the brothel—the jail—the hospital—and the morgue—else she nourish children who will be clean and strong, teach them love and reverence, make men and women of them to serve the state!"

But Mme. Jenesco merely touched her tears away at stated intervals.

Then Partridge spoke—just a whisper, though, and a single word. "Belle," he said.

And he passed Mme. Jenesco's arm under his own.

And as if this were the signal he had been waiting for—or the inspiration—the preacher spoke the concluding words.

"Amen! Amen!"

And several of the pink roses let their

petals fall—like a blessing—with perfect generosity—giving all they had.

CHAPTER LXVI.

FOR SERVICES RENDERED.

A SHORT time afterward Mélissine and Eugene held their first family council. Only the two of them were present—the king and the queen, the heads of a new dynasty. It was their world, and they had the ordering of it. There were vast and wonderful plans ahead—strange lands to visit, schools and temples to build, model towns to design.

But there was one thing above all that engrossed them just now—something that couldn't wait.

How about Partridge?

Buckhannon spoke: "He said that it was something about money. I don't know what it was, but he seemed to be troubled."

Mélissine: "Dear, dear old soul!"

"The only way I can dope it out," Buckhannon proceeded, "is that the old gentleman has fumbled his accounts some way or other. He doesn't strike me as if he would be much of a bookkeeper, and you say that he has always had the handling of the family funds."

Mélissine was full of sympathy. "What does it matter," she said, "even if he did make some mistake? Oh, I want him to be happy! I want him to be happy today! I want him to be happy like us!"

"He can't be happy like us," smiled Buckhannon, kissing her upturned face. "But I have an idea that might help."

He sketched the plan that he had in mind.

"And oh, that would be wonderful," cried Mélissine. "You are so wonderful!"

The rest of the council took place in the drawing-room with Partridge himself there. It hadn't been intended that there should be anything formal about it. Still, Partridge himself could not keep all the formality out—even when Mélissine (Mrs. Eugene Buckhannon), forgot her new dignity and kissed him as if she had been six years old, and even when Buckhannon shook hands with him effusively for no particular reason. At that, Partridge was inclined to treat Mr. Buckhannon, sir, as if Mr. Buckhannon were a new Tyrone.

"Thank you, sir. I am quite overwhelmed."

But had they come to question him after all, make him divulge the truth just now when every one should be so happy?

There was no immediate answer.

"We thought that we'd better have a little talk about the future," said Buckhannon. "We might as well sit down. There is no particular hurry; is there? We are both mighty glad to have heard what you had to tell us about Mme. Jenesco. It ought to mean happiness for both of you—both of you alone in the world to some extent. There is no objection to her being present."

"She has stepped out, sir," said Partridge. He had seated himself on the edge of a chair. He was plainly ill at ease—as plainly ill at ease as a gentleman ever allows himself to appear in the presence of others. "She has gone to carry some flowers to a friend."

Partridge referred to old Goodenough. But he wasn't going to tell them that anything had happened to Goodenough for fear of spoiling their perfect day. He had come to a somewhat similar decision with regard to his own affairs—and theirs. If it came to the worst he was going to tell a lie—a white lie—for their sakes.

"You see," said Buckhannon, "Mélissine and I are going to leave pretty soon for Tennessee. I'm going to take her out there to see my folks. They'll be as crazy about her as I am."

Mélissine's only comment was a happy sigh.

"May I ask when you are going to leave, sir?" Partridge inquired.

"In about two hours."

"Oh, then, shall I see to the tickets, sir?" Here was a chance for escape.

"We sha'n't need any tickets," Buckhannon replied. "We're going out by auto. I have just about closed for a new car. I can get it when I want it."

"Wouldn't that be expensive?" Partridge ventured.

"It's expensive, all right," Buckhannon admitted lightly. "It's a good one—the best on the market. But nothing is too good—for Mélissine. And besides we'll be wanting to take it with us when we go over to Paris. We'll probably be wanting to go to Paris as soon as we've finished up seeing my folks out in Tennessee. But of course we'll stop over in New York and tell you howdy before we go."

"I trust," said Partridge, "that you will have a pleasant trip, sir." He was at a loss for anything else to say. It was in his heart to come out with the statements that such a program would be a rather severe strain on the Tyrone family fortune. At the same time he was making a mental calculation. The thing *could* be managed. It would *have* to be managed—on Mélissine's account. There was a hundred dollars or so in the house. He completed his thought aloud; "I could get a draft from the bank to-morrow."

Buckhannon laughed.

"That," he announced, "brings us around to what Mélissine and I wanted to say." He turned to Mélissine. "You say it," he urged.

"We both think the world and all of you," said Mélissine.

But after that she faltered. She hastily arose and drew up a chair close to the one occupied by Partridge. She reached over and took one of Partridge's hands in both of hers.

"You tell him," she commanded in turn, with a smile and a blush for Buckhannon.

"The point is," said Buckhannon—self; "the point is that we're both all-fired grateful to you, and all that sort of thing. And besides, we're going to be gone away from here a good deal of our time. I suppose that we'll be building ourselves a new house, anyway, when we finally come back to New York to live permanently. And you've worked so long for the family, and have been so faithful. I don't have to go into all that."

"If you'd but let me explain," said Partridge brokenly.

"Look here," said Buckhannon, with a touch of command; "we both know that you are the most honorable person in the world. We think you're great. And as for me—I've got enough ready money for ten young couples to set up housekeeping on—especially if their tastes were as modest as ours. Isn't that so, Mélissine?"

"Yes," she breathed, patting Partridge's hand.

"So she wants you to take this house and the family fortune and everything." He paused. "She says so. They're yours!"

Partridge almost collapsed.

"I've always felt somehow as if it belonged to you," said Mélissine, softly.

"And I agree with her," said Buckhannon briskly. "You're no longer the butler here. You're the master of the house."

He had jumped to his feet with a smile. He could see that Partridge was still upset—overwhelmed indeed. He himself was glad that the ordeal was over. Like most men, he was fearful of anything that bordered on sentiment.

He was going to say something more—something about leaving all the legal details to Judge Bancroft—so that Partridge would have to become the master of this house where he had served so long. But just then a diversion was created by a knock at the door—Mme. Jenesco returning, perhaps: and the diversion brought Partridge to himself and to his feet.

"Are you at home, sir," he whispered, "should some one inquire?"

He straightened his coat of service. He headed for the door.

CHAPTER LXVII.

THEY VANISH.

"I AM sure that it was that way with him always," said Mélissine.

This was years afterward. Mélissine was the matron now. She was mature. But she was more beautiful than ever. She would keep on getting more beautiful than ever—as is the way with women of heart and understanding.

"I am sure that when the dear Lord spoke to Partridge there was nothing that He could have said that would have pleased Partridge better than: 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant!'"

Buckhannon droned.

He and Mélissine were so completely one that such drones—and silences—could pass for speech. A lovely look of tender recollection had come into Mélissine's face. They had driven down from their up-town place for a look at Cinnamon Street. But Cinnamon Street was changed. Gone was Tony Zamboni's; gone the druggist's; gone the chapel and the churchyard; gone old No. 6! There were warehouses there, and a new garage. It must have been a spirit-picture that brought that look into Mélissine's face.

"He was the perfect gentleman," said Mélissine fondly.

"He was all of that," Buckhannon agreed. "To think of our giving him something that was already his!"

"Something that had been his all along!"

"And his hiding the truth from us even after he was dead. If it hadn't been for those private papers they found when they were settling up old Judge Bancroft's estate we might never have known about it—unless Mme. Jenesco had told."

"She never would have told. She had become too much like Partridge. Where is she now? Still—"

"Still running the day-nursery, and happy! I saw her only yesterday."

They relapsed into silence for a while.

They were still standing there—they had left their car around the corner in the granite-paved avenue—when two very old men came hobbling down the street side by side. Both of these old men were shrunken, but one had been large and the other had been small. He who had been large had a bony shaven face out of which stared a pair of fixed and owlish eyes. He who had been small—and was now smaller yet—had a furtive look about him. He had a scraggly gray beard on his chin, but for all that he looked like a decrepit old rat—"a rat that had seen a cat."

"I beg your pardon," said Buckhannon, saluting them.

"Eh?" said the rat.

The rat's companion merely stared.

"We were looking for Cinnamon Street," said Buckhannon.

"Eugene!" Mélissine chided him softly.

But Buckhannon took her arm under his.

"We were looking for Cinnamon Street," he said; "No. 6 Cinnamon Street."

"That's the garage over yonder," said he of the bony face.

"There must have been some mistake," said Buckhannon. "This No. 6 was a fine old house—a beautiful old house—in which some beautiful people lived."

The human rat now began to giggle. He stamped the sidewalk with his cane. The other didn't smile. He merely stared. It was he who spoke.

"You mean the *old* No. 6," said he.

"It must have been," said Buckhannon.

"It couldn't have been," said the Owl. "because the house I mean wasn't beautiful. Neither was the people who lived in it."

"Are you sure?"

"For upward of thirty years I was the policeman on this beat," said he who had now revealed himself to be Hickcock. "It was a house with a bad name—such a bird-cage as even New York might be leary about!"

"But why did it have a bad name?" asked Buckhannon.

"Ask my friend here," Hickcock said dispassionately. "He ought to know. He kept the drug-store here right across from it."

The druggist, thus appealed to, stopped giggling and became cautious. He glanced about as if afraid of eavesdroppers.

"I could say well enough," said he, "if I wanted to tell all I know. It had a bad name—that's all."

"I bet he doesn't know," said Buckhannon to Hickcock.

"I do." The druggist bridled. "But I won't tell. It wouldn't be professional."

"And what do you know about it?" Buckhannon demanded, returning to Hickcock.

"They say it was haunted," Hickcock replied.

"Haunted?"

"Some queer things take place in a city like this," said Hickcock, with the air of one who means more than his words imply.

"That's right," the druggist giggled.

Hickcock turned his owlish eyes on the druggist, brought them back to Buckhannon. Hickcock soberly pointed a finger at his head, meaning that the druggist was not quite responsible, then said:

"I once had a friend who said that old men and old houses are all haunted. I don't know what he meant. But I know that he spoke the truth. He was that kind —except when he was sober."

"Thank you," said Buckhannon, meaning that the interview was closed. Buckhannon had become a man who could close an interview like that. And the two old cronies continued their way. "There goes the world in general," said Buckhannon, pressing the arm under his own.

"Just ignorance," Mélissine forgave them, with a tearful little laugh.

"Just ignorance," Buckhannon agreed; "and the lack of charity that ignorance breeds. Houses and hearts—we've got to know what goes on inside of them before we can judge."

Mélissine returned the pressure of his arm.

There, for a fleeting moment, it was as if all that had vanished had returned again —old No. 6, of the green blinds and the Colonial door; the smithy to one side, with its ailanthus-tree; and the churchyard on the other, with its abandoned chapel and its flowering locusts. A stillness gathered in the street. Once more the air was perfumed. Then, down the stoop of No. 6—the spectral presence of it—there came—for Buckhannon, at least—the nimble old servant who was Partridge, followed by the stately Nathan Tyrone and his fair, old-fashioned daughter.

Mélissine sighed. She had followed his thought.

"They vanish," said Buckhannon.

"But we love them still," said Mélissine, "and shall love them always."

They turned and slowly walked away, themselves thus vanishing from Cinnamon Street forever.

(The end.)

Jackie Daley's Climb to Fame

by Frank Gillooly

IT was five minutes to noon; a clear, scorching August day; and an air of peaceful quiet hovered over the cool bright barroom of Adolph Schaeffer. Present were three-and-a-half customers: two men deep in discussion at the end of the room; a third, near the door, wrapped in reverie; and a child perched on the bar midway down the room, being entertained by the bartender.

Suddenly, the tranquil atmosphere was electrified by the lone man's deep-voiced outburst.

"I'll stand it no longer, by Carrigan! I'll show 'em all something!" he thundered. His fist smote the bar.

The two men whirled to behold the wrathful Hercules; and saw a wizen, lean, little fellow, engrossed in a lonely tirade. His countenance, stature, and costume contradicted one another; but his blue flannel shirt, blue trousers, and heavy shoes—one

trimly laced and polished, the other misshapen and dirty—together with his conversation, proclaimed him a gallant firefighter.

"I've been asleep, letting others climb over me and become officers! Why, I can eat smoke and stand heat better than any of 'em!"

Oblivious of any audience, he unburdened his troubled heart. The little cap touching the back of his head failed to check the thin blond hair rioting in moist wisps. The nickel-rimmed spectacles hiding his sunken, weak eyes stood on his nose away from his blazing face.

His abused, hairy hands gripped the bar. As a chorus of whistles screeched, he started; glancing at the clock, he drained his glass and was gone. Jumping Jehoshophat! Twelve o'clock, and he had not eaten!

"Hey! Jackie!" yelled the barkeeper.

"Can you beat that?" he asked the amazed spectators. "Ain't he the sketch, going away without— Wait until his wife lands on him; she'll bring him to life!"

Mrs. Daley "landed," complementing earlier labors, for she was the cause of his aberration. Jackie had hurried home late, and when his lunch was not ready had vented caustic reflections on the obligations of a dutiful housewife. Affairs of state impressed her from another angle. She had responded in a cyclonic oration during which, Jackie had snatched the older baby from his path and fled; seeking solace in the less turbulent *entourage* at Schaeffer's.

Echoes of her deliverance tortured him as his reluctant steps dragged him homeward.

"If you were half a man, you'd be sporting the trappings of a captain, like Mr. Mallon. There's a man for you! His wife isn't a house-slave! I do all the work and mind four children besides, with never a moment's rest. I want help, and mind you, I'm going to get it.

"You're the fine specimen! Fourteen years in the department and only a common, twelve-hundred-dollar ladderman!"

Mrs. Daley was militant. Her domestic designs included an officer, with his officer's pay, as the household head. When she thus emphasized her suffrage issues, her plaints were to him a burning trial.

Amid her ominous silence, Jackie finished gulping his lunch.

"Where is John?" demanded his wife.

The abused one disclaimed knowledge of the child's whereabouts, then checked himself. Suffering Snufflerdom! He had left him at Schaeffer's. His wife apprehended his guilt.

"You good-for-nothing numskull! March out and find that boy! Look at your shoes! Mind you, it's a quarter after twelve, and—"

Little John was enjoying the attentions of Schaeffer's noon gathering, and the bartender was wearied of defending his bachelorhood, when Jackie bore off his offspring. He reached the station just twenty minutes late.

"Think it was your day off, captain?" inquired a comrade.

"Don't you recall me, Captain Daley? I used to ride on the truck with you," greeted another.

Stalking past them, Jackie hastened to the captain.

"My wife was—not feeling—just right, so I had to wait for my dinner," he apologized.

"Too bad," replied the captain, "I hope it won't occur again. Jackie, let me know hereafter before you borrow my hat."

"I didn't see your hat!"

"You didn't tarry at the mirror, then. What are you wearing?"

"My own—" As Jackie swept off his headgear to silence the captain, his eyes fell on its two gold horns.

"Yours is with your newspaper in the sitting room," grinned the captain.

Changing into his service uniform, Jackie shambled into the bunk-room and sought his bed.

His lifetime marked two disastrous mistakes—he had become married; and he had grown absent-minded brooding over that blunder. He sighed. Gosh! With his trials, small wonder some one was reminding him that his boots or his helmet were not in place on the apparatus; that he was going off without his keys, or wearing somebody else's clothes. He had plenty to think about! Oh, why had he married?

Marriage had contained only disillusion-

ment. When he had joined the Fire Department, perceiving a life's work demanding little effort for its high compensation, he had considered his "hard" days ended. The world seemed his.

Two years later he had laid his heart and his fortunes—and, he repined, his mind also—at the feet of Miss Sarah Annabell DuGann. Then he had youth and beauty and all the world for conquest; now— He groaned. Hardly had the echo of the wedding bells died when his life's plans were upset; and thus had it gone since. He was always wrong!

The climax had arrived in his wife's ultimatum for household help. This would require additional income; hence Sarah Annabell had launched on her course—wherein he sensed the directing finger of the elder female DuGann—of making his life devoid of ease until he should sufficiently improve their resources. What an unhappy lot!

A perfumed vision seemed to enshroud him in a soothing repose. A ruddy, laughing face beamed on him from a shower of golden hair. Two smile-wrinkled eyes seemed to whisper memories that thrilled. The picture hovered in his worried mind.

What a mistake he had made in not marrying Rosie Thomas! Even yet, as a widow twice-removed, she was adorable. And she had always admired him so!

He tossed and perspired, reviewing it all. That was the trouble: it required pull to succeed! How was it done? He must do something. What could he do? Be a man, perhaps, like Captain Mallon, always chasing to the chief with tales? There was Lieutenant Beswick: promoted for carrying two children down a ladder. Huh! Anybody could do that—if he got the chance! *He* never had a chance! It was tough luck, in all these years never an opportunity for something big.

Why not make his own opportunities? He could get commended—if he had the chance. He could secure peace of mind, too, if he had advantages like others.

"That's what I'll do!" he ejaculated, so forcibly that his own voice startled him. Sleepy heads popped from surrounding beds.

He had it! At the next fire, he would await his chance, then drop his ax and snatch a hose and take it where none would dare follow; into the very heart of the conflagration. That would stir them! Then they would *have* to recognize him. Afterwards—

He saw himself defying the towering form of Sarah Annabell; he saw her determined face under its straight, black hair, bowing obeisances; *his* cringing days were ended. The scheme was perfect!

Sustained thinking soon proved fatiguing. Beads of perspiration attested his mental effort. He arose and searched for his thin overalls, which members were allowed to substitute for trousers for sleeping, but they seemed nowhere available.

Getting back into bed, he yanked up the sheet; furtively glancing round, he slipped off his trousers and blouse. He immediately went fast asleep; despite his uneasy conscience at having broken the department's most stringent rule: That members must sleep with all their clothes on.

In a dream, rich in honors, promotions, the adoration of a blond, buxom woman, he was startled by the cry. "Wide awake!" Bells clamored; horse-hoofs pounded the wooden floors.

With a leap, he landed on the floor in a bewildering tangle of shirts, trousers, bedclothing. Now he might miss that alarm! Visions of the penalty haunted his mind as he frantically scrambled into his clothes and dashed down-stairs.

The struggle raging to harness a new inside horse enabled Jackie to steal to his apparatus. In a daze, he donned his boots and rubber-coat; barely in time to jump on the running-board as the big truck started to roll on its journey.

The fire was in a large house on a fashionable avenue. The lower floor was ablaze when the first companies arrived, but quick work with the water had reduced it to a smoking wreckage. The flames still roared in a wide flue between houses. Axes made little impression on the formidable brick wall, so Jackie was dispatched to procure some crow-bars.

Truck No. 1, having arrived before his company, Truck No. 6, had stopped before the house; and he had to encircle it to reach his apparatus opposite on the wide

avenue. As he brushed the throng of spectators, a man was voicing sympathy for a poor sick woman penned on the third floor of her house.

A woman up there in that smoke, and sick, too? He peered at the window, and saw some one in white struggling with the fastening. He began to note his surroundings. Girard Avenue; this must be near where Rosie Thomas lives.

He studied the street and the house. That was her very house, sure enough! That must be her at the window! It was strange that the first companies had not searched the house, he was thinking, when another thought gripped him. Here was the chance he wanted! It was the golden opportunity; but wasn't it his luck that it should come when he was unable to embrace it?

His glance strayed to the apparatus under the window. Truck No. 1, stationed two squares away, must have arrived three minutes before any others. Why hadn't they searched the house?

The first captain to arrive retains charge over the fire-ground until relieved by the chief. This captain was doubly responsible. It was Captain Mallon, the man his wife established as example for him!

Why have some men everything desirable in life, and others nothing? Everyone knew how George Mallon was in love with Rosie. He seemed to make all the women enraptured. *He* could cut Mallon out with Rosie.

He mounted the platform of his truck and studied the window thoughtfully.

With a turn of the air-valve, he raised the ponderous ladder until it overreached the window; operating the turn-table, he swung the ladder around until it touched the wall; directly over the rival apparatus.

The boiling heat made climbing torturous. His heavy rubber-coat was an added affliction; halting in his climb, he worked out of it and let it fall.

"Hey! Come down here, you, 'Truck Six!' Come back here!"

Onlookers discovered what he was about and thought he could not make it! He would not turn back! When he returned with that precious form safe in his arms, they they would realize their blunders.

He courted delicious visions. He contemplated the forbearance with which he would let his captain exclaim: "That was damn clever work, Daley!"

Sarah Annabell would pay dearly. He had endured the advantages she had taken of his lassitude; now that he had conquered his world, *he* would be the unmerciful tyrant.

Daringly he swung over to grasp the window frame, when a voice barked at him.

"What are you doing up here, you blooming idiot?"

He gripped the ladder fiercely. His head swam as though it had been struck. Visions of promotion were evaporating, his pedestal of fame was tottering, as he peered into the face of—the chief!

That dignitary, in white coat and helmet, had been inspecting the house, opening the windows to liberate the smoke; and hearing the shouts from below, had returned to this one and watched Jackie approach it. Jackie reasoned it all out as he floundered there. Gosh! He had made a mess of things!

Wasn't that his luck? Below him the crowd was howling its appreciation of his daring! His courage returned with an inspiration to tell the chief about the man saying a woman was imprisoned here. The chief would appreciate his bravery, and the crowd lustily cheering him would never dream of his mistake. Rosie would be in that multitude, and would witness her hero's daring! Bird-song and sunshine claimed his heart.

"Chief—I—a man—"

A fireman who had hurried up the ladder, offered him a coat.

"Get into that, you boob, before you get arrested!" he ordered. "What sort of exhibition is this? Think you're some 'Diving Venus'?"

Jackie looked, and his dream-house tumbled. In the climb, his boots had wrinkled down below his pointy knees. From his prominent calves to the shrinking waist where his blouse terminated, his spare little limbs were blazoned in the brilliance of his snug union-suit.

He had forgotten to put on his trousers!

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

PRIDE of race is not to be confused with insular national prejudice. Nature herself has wisely ordained the former, while the latter rests on a valid but human convention. Nature has little concern for the individual, and works only in the interests of the race. When the interests or the emotions of the individual conflict with the impersonal inhibitions of nature, sorrow, suffering and often tragedy ensue. In our new serial for next week—

CLUNG

BY MAX BRAND

Author of "The Untamed," "Children of the Night," "Trailin'," etc.

these observations are strikingly enforced. *Clung* sounds Chinese, and since *Li*, his reputed father, was an unmistakable Oriental, all the insular prejudice of the southern Arizona town was visited on his head. *Clung* found the rôle of a half-breed a hard one to play, in spite of his quick eye and lightning draw, and neither his Oriental calm nor his contempt for death supported him in his isolation when he caught, as he supposed, a woman's recoil in the supreme moment of her testing. Then he decided, in spite of his parentage, he would return to the ways and the gods of his foster-father, *Li Clung*.

You have here a figure unique in fiction, a man white in blood and lineage, but Chinese in temperament and tradition—an Occidental Oriental. We haven't the shadow of a doubt you will agree with us this is a Brand creation, which, in point of novelty and interest, will give *Whistling Dan* a run for his money. The action of the story is as splendid as the characterization, and the reader will be dull indeed who can read one page of this latest Brand tale without a passionate desire to follow *Clung* to his goal.

NOT the least attractive item on next week's menu for ALL-STORY WEEKLY readers is a ripping South Sea schooner story

"MEASURE FOR MEASURE"

BY CAPTAIN DINGLE

Author of "The Clean Up," "No Fear," "The Pirate Woman," etc.

Captain Dingle has long since established his right to be taken seriously in matters of the sea. A long and varied career before the mast, and from cabin-boy to skipper, has familiarized the captain not only with the peculiar moods of the sea but the unplumbed depths of human nature, as well. Certainly this novelette betrays a familiarity with the seamy side of human nature, which some people erroneously believe to be always heroic, on the water. There is not much to choose between human nature on land or on the sea. But "measure for measure," men and women, usually get their desserts. The law for compensation—But why philosophize, when you have a rattling good and dramatic story to expound the justice of the gods? "Measure for Measure" is strong meat for strong stomachs. If you have a weak digestion, leave it alone. Captain Dingle is a man's writer, and his story calls for virile readers.

THE fifth story of Raymond Lester's "NAN RUSSELL, INVESTIGATRIX," series, "NAN'S DAY OFF," is every bit as interesting and entertaining as the others telling of the adventures of the charming Nan. This time the young oper-

ative is faced with the problem of finding a missing child—a problem which she solves with surprising results. And—of course—the ever hopeful Mickey is still faced by his great problem—which is Nan. You'll like this story as well as you have liked the earlier ones of the series.

If you've ever gone steamboating down the Mississippi River or, failing that, if you've ever read one of Mark Twain's Mississippi River stories, you have fallen under the spell of that great river's fascination. Raymond S. Spears knows that river as most of us know the streets of our home-town, and he has succeeded to the *n*th degree in transferring its spell to the printed page in his fine story in next week's issue, "BEYOND ALL KNOWLEDGE." And while "Old Mississip'" plays a big part in this drama, there are other likable characters—most important of them a fine young river engineer and a charming Southern girl.

It is some time since we published a story by J. L. Schoolcraft. Old-timers will remember with pleasure the stories which this writer has contributed to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Next week we are happy to be able to give you "THE UNDYING FLAME." This is a snug little story of a mountaineer feud, told with sympathy and understanding, and a full appreciation of dramatic values. Old readers will welcome the return of Mr. Schoolcraft, and new readers will find him a delightful discovery.

LIKE A BREATH OF MOUNTAIN AIR

TO THE EDITOR:

While I am not a subscriber to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY I have purchased it from the newsstands every week since the initial number years ago and have been much interested in what your readers have had to say, adverse and otherwise, in your little Heart to Heart Talks. During the recent printers' strike I was anxious about the non-publication of several issues and when they all came out together had quite a time of it in trying to make up loss of time.

If an old newspaper man, and now a staid statistician, may express his views of your splendid publication I wish to say that I regard it as *par excellence* of all the current periodicals. It is like a tonic, or a breath of mountain air, to a tired worker at night, and after working all day through with dry statistical matter, I find more refreshment in reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY at night than going to the theater or the "movies."

I have noted what some of your readers have to say in the Heart to Heart Talks regarding the stories of the West and quite agree with some of them. We are having too many stories of the West of the William Hart motion picture style or the melodrama of the old days. These stories are not true of the West, in my opinion, and are an injustice to its people. I am saying this as for a number of years I was the editor of a Western commercial publication, and have traveled all over the West from Washington, Oregon, Montana, and the Dakotas on the north to Arizona and New Mexico on the south. I have lived with the people, in the cities and upon the ranches, and know them.

Thus in your story "Th' Ramblin' Kid" by Earle Bowman, while I like the writer's style and diction, in almost the same paragraphs he speaks of automobiles and garages and the cowboys wearing "chaps" and "flashing their forty-fives." If a cowboy wore chaps on one of the ranches of today he would be hooted out of town on the spot. If he flashed a forty-five or the modern automatic —he would be arrested as promptly as he would upon the streets of New York. Of course this sounds very nice in fiction but it is not true. These little inaccuracies jar when one reads them. When I read a Western story I like the writer to intimate that the scene of his story in laid in the West as it used to be, and not as it is today. The modern cowboy is a very up-to-date gentleman and goes around dressed in velveteens, or corduroys, with the cavalry puttee in place of the old "chaps," and if he carries a gun at all it is a sporting rifle of some kind, or a carbine, and this only in hunting and remote districts.

I remember having read a very good story some years ago in the *All-Story* which included quite a little fishing, but the writer spoiled his theme by speaking of sea-trout in a Rocky Mountain lake, when everybody knows that the "sea trout" is but another name for our salt-water weakfish. These little inaccuracies often spoil a good story in my humble opinion.

By no means discontinue your "different stories" as some of your readers wish you to do. "Everybody to his own way of thinking," of course, but I enjoy those stories more than any others you publish—they make the ALL-STORY WEEKLY "different" from any other magazine. When I was on a lonely patrol during the late war I often looked up at the stars and wondered if they were peopled and what those people were like. Many a soldier thought of the stars at night, let me tell you, so as not to have his mind on more terrible things—those that we saw during the day. Why, then, are such stories as "Under the Moons of Mars," "War Lord of Mars," "Palos of the Dog Star Pack," and others so improbable as some of your readers think? Mr. England and Mr. Burroughs are the two best writers you have and I would like to have more of their work. Is not another Martian story about due? Another sequel to "The Moon Pool" would also be good reading. What has become of *Larry* and *Lakla?*

Well, I imagine that you think that this letter is quite long enough—certainly too long to use in your limited space among the Heart to Heart Talks, but I did wish to write you and tell you how much I have enjoyed the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and hope to continue to read it each week as long as I live. My wife generally has a quarrel with

me at night when I bring it home as she wants to read the stories first.

Wishing you a long and continued success, I am,

Gratefully yours,

Broad Street
New York.

EDWIN IRVINE HAINES.

E. K. MEANS TRUE TO LIFE

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed find fifteen cents in stamps for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for October 25 which I was unfortunate enough to miss. I hope you have this number in stock, as I would feel pretty bad if you didn't. I tried all the newsstands, drug stores and any place I thought they might handle magazines and I could not obtain it. I think I did well to do without it during the recent printers' strike, and as I have been a reader of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY since the days of the *Cavalier*, I hate to miss such good serials as "Ashes to Ashes," "Where Dead Men Walk" and "Eastward Ho!" which were in that number.

I have the latest numbers out but I won't read them until I can get the connecting link in the chain, as it would spoil the good thought of all the rest. I cannot mention all the authors I like as that would not be fair, because the ALL-STORY WEEKLY always has been paramount in my estimation. Was very pleased to get the novelette in November 1st number. I laughed until I cried, and "The Chariot of Fire" was certainly true to the character, and nobody can tell it better than E. K. Means. Sorry to come to a close for I could almost write a novelette of praise for my ALL-STORY WEEKLY. Hoping to get my desired number soon, I am your ardent reader.

Akron, Ohio. JOS. H. BROWN.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

I have been a constant reader of your magazine for a long time and I surely do appreciate the good stories. I won't try to tell which I like best of the stories or authors as I am so well pleased with them all. "Broadway Bab" would chase away the worse case of blues a person ever had. I like to read the Heart Beats. It gives you an idea of what the other readers think of the stories and authors. I am satisfied with both, also the price of the magazine, as it fits poor people's pocketbooks where there are a good many who would have to do without it if it cost more. This is my first letter and if it don't find the waste basket it will be funny. From a well-satisfied reader.

Shortsville, New York. MARY COLEMAN.

Enclosed you will find one dollar in money order for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three months starting January 3. And as I am writing I wish to thank you for all of the enjoyment I have had from your stories. No magazine is its equal. The only fault I have found is the continued stories and they are all so interesting it is hard to wait until the next week. I have so many favorite authors it would take too much time to write them all. Hoping for a successful year to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

St. Louis, Mo. MRS. K. SANDAGE.

Enclosed find one dollar for which please send me the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for three months. We all like your magazine very well, and just at present, I can hardly wait for the next issue of "The Gold Girl." I find it a very interesting story. I read a good many of the continued stories in your magazine and most of them are fine, and so are the short stories. Of course there are some stories that do not appeal to me, but which others may enjoy very much. I don't think much of the story "Raspberry Jam," but "A Man Named Jones" and "The Hidden Kingdom" were excellent. There are many more on the good and the bad list also, if I had time to name them. We have been reading the ALL-STORY WEEKLY for several years and can hardly do without it. When the magazines get in town it's a rush to get your book before some one else gets it. So that is why I am subscribing. Hoping to receive the first issue soon.

El Dorado, Kansas. MISS AGNES YOGGERST.

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Stamping the price on every pair of shoes as a protection against high prices and unreasonable profits is only one example of the constant endeavor of W. L. Douglas to protect his customers. W. L. Douglas name on shoes is his pledge that they are the best in materials, workmanship and style possible to produce at the price. Into every pair go the results of sixty-seven years experience in making shoes, dating back to the time when W. L. Douglas was a lad of seven, pegging shoes.

The quality of W.L.Douglas product is guaranteed by more than 40 years experience in making fine shoes. The smart styles are the leaders in the fashion centers of America. They are made in a well-equipped factory at Brockton, Mass., by the highest paid, skilled shoemakers, under the direction and supervision of experienced men, all working with an honest determination to make the best shoes for the price that money can buy. The retail prices are the same everywhere. They cost no more in San Francisco than they do in New York.

CAUTION—Insist upon having W.L.Douglas shoes. The name and price is plainly stamped on the bottom before they leave the factory. Carefully examine the stamped price on the sole, if it has been changed or mutilated in any way, BEWARE of FRAUD

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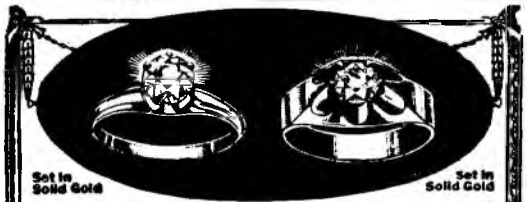

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16 AND 60
Both Men Start On The Road To Success

One with years of experience to guide him—the other staking his future on what he has today. A school teacher from Iowa and a school boy from Ohio—Each fired with an ambition to own a business of his own.

Herbert Williams, fifteen, just a kid, with a man's grit, wanted to "do something in autos"—begged his father—convinced him that Haywood's Tire Surgery meant business and money—took the complete course and in two weeks was ready to start in a lasting business.

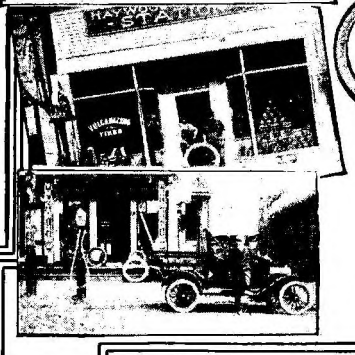
Big, honest, Levi Bowles, the school teacher at West Branch, Iowa, disregarded his years—Came to Indianapolis, learned Tire Surgery, and when handed his diploma was prepared to start a business that would earn him from $2,500 to $4,000 per year.

HAYWOOD'S TIRE SURGERY is a definite method by which old, worn out, discarded automobile tires are rebuilt, reconstructed and made fit to render four to five thousand more miles of travel. Tire Surgery derives its name from the surgeon-like skill of the operator, who, by the Haywood Method, becomes a master-craftsman.

ANYONE CAN LEARN IT Let Herbert Williams and big Levi Bowles be your guide to a business of your own—neither youth nor old age are barriers.

Haywood Equips Tire Repair Stations Complete

All the tools and machines used are of special Haywood design, enabling work to be turned out that is up to the Haywood standard of quality.



GET into BUSINESS for YOURSELF

Tire Surgery is taught at Indianapolis or by mail. The course prepares you to operate a SURGERY STATION with unfailing skill. It is intelligently explained so that a complete and higher education is unnecessary—Bring to Mr. Haywood an ambitious he-man with a GOOD COMMON SENSE BRAIN, and he will RETURN HIM, a BUSINESS MAN with a MOST WONDERFUL PROFESSION with which TO SUCCEED.

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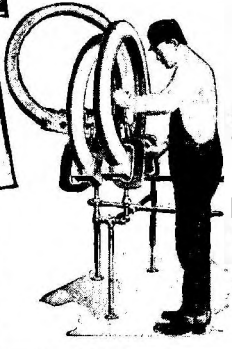

produces the universally popular "rib-tread"—smooth as glass and rich looking in appearance.

Get the Facts. Whether you are in business now, or working for someone else, you should write and get my free catalog about Haywood Tire Surgery—Use the coupon, or write a letter.

M. HAYWOOD, President

Haywood Tire & Equipment Co.
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"We sat before the fireplace, Mary and I, with Betty perched on the arm of the big chair. It was our first evening in our own home! There were two glistening tears in Mary's eyes, yet a smile was on her lips. I knew what she was thinking.

"Five years before we had started bravely out together. The first month had taught us the old, old lesson that two cannot live as cheaply as one. I had left school in the grades to go to work and my all too thin pay envelope was a weekly reminder of my lack of training. In a year Betty came—three mouths to feed now. Meanwhile living costs were soaring. Only my salary and I were standing still.

"Then one night Mary came to me. 'Jim,' she said. 'Why don't you go to school again—right here at home? You can put in an hour or two after supper each night while I sew. Learn to do some one thing. You'll make good—I *know* you will.'

"Well, we talked it over and that very night I wrote to Scranton. A few days later I had taken up a course in the work I was in. It was surprising how rapidly the mysteries of our business became clear to me—took on a new fascination. In a little while an opening came. I was ready for it and was promoted—with an increase. Then I was advanced again. There was money enough to even lay a little aside. So it went.

"And now the fondest dream of all has come true. We have a real home of our own with the little comforts and luxuries Mary had always longed for, a little place, as she says, that 'Betty can be proud to grow up in.'

"I look back now in pity at those first blind stumbling years. Each evening after supper the doors of opportunity had swung wide and I had passed them by. How grateful I am that Mary helped me to see that night the golden hours that lay within."

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No. 4

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